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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND DANDY CHATER ***

THE SECOND DANDY CHATER

BY
TOM GALLON

Author of
"Tatterly,"
"The Kingdom of Hate,"
et cetera.



NEW YORK

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By TOM GALLON.

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The Second Dandy Chater

1

CHAPTER I

WHEREIN THE QUICK AND THE DEAD MEET

If there is one place, in the wide world, more dreary and disconsolate-looking than another, on a gusty evening in March, it is that part of Essex which lies some twenty miles to the north of the Thames, and is bordered nowhere, so far as the eye can reach, by anything but flat and desolate marshlands, and by swampy roads and fields. For there, all the contrary winds of Heaven seem to meet, to play a grand game of buffets with themselves, and everything else which rises an inch or two above the ground; there, the very sun, if he happen to have shown his face at all during the day, sinks more sullenly than anywhere else, as though disgusted with the prospect, and glad to get to bed; there, the few travellers who have been so unwise, or so unfortunate, as to be left out of doors, are surly in consequence, and give but grudging greeting to any one they meet.

On just such an evening as this a solitary man, muffled to the eyes, fought a desperate battle with the various winds, something to his own discomfiture, and very much to the ruffling of his temper, on the way to the small village of Bamberton. The railway leaves off suddenly, some six miles from Bamberton, and the man who would visit that interesting spot must perforce pay for a fly at the Railway Inn, if he desire to enter the place with any ostentation, or must walk.

2

In the case of this particular man, he desired, for purposes of his own, to attract as little notice as possible; and was, therefore, tramping through the mud and a drizzling rain, as cheerfully as might be. He was a tall, well-built man, of about eight-and-twenty years of age; with strong, well-defined features, rendered the more so by the fact that his face was cleanly shaven; possibly from having led a solitary life, he had a habit of communing with himself.

"A cheery welcome, this, to one's native land—to one's native place!" he muttered, bending his head, as a fresh gust of wind and rain drove at him. "Why—if the devil himself were in league against me, and had made up his mind to oppose my coming, he couldn't fight harder than this! 'Pon my word, it almost looks like a bad omen for you, Philip Crowdy—a devilish bad omen!"

Despite the wind and the rain and the gathering night, however, the man presently seated himself on a stone, near the roadside, and within sight of the twinkling lights of the village, as though he has something weighty on his mind, which must be thrashed out before he could proceed to his destination. Despite the wind and the rain, too, he took the matter quite good-humouredly, in putting a suppositious case to himself—even doing it with some jocularly.

3

"Now Phil, my boy—you've got to be very careful. There's no getting away from the fact that you are not wanted—and you certainly will not be welcome. The likeness is all right; I've seen a picture of the respected Dandy Chater—and there's nothing to be feared, from that point of view. The only thing is, that I must feel my way, and know exactly what I am doing. And, for the moment, darkness suits me better than daylight. My first business is to get as near to Dandy Chater as possible, and observe him."

The tall man, bringing his ruminations to a close, sat for a moment or two, deep in thought—so deep in thought, indeed, that he did not hear the sound of light steps approaching him, from the direction of the village; and was absolutely unaware that there was any other figure but himself in all the landscape, until he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and started hurriedly to his feet.

Facing him, in the semi-darkness, was a young girl, who, even by that light, he could see was unmistakably pretty. She was quite young, and, although her dress was poor and common, there was an indefinable air of grace about her, which set her apart—or seemed to do, in the man's eyes—from any mere rustic girl. To his surprise, she stood quite still before him, with her eyes cast down, as though waiting for him to speak. After a moment or two of embarrassing silence, Mr. Philip Crowdy spoke.

4

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a low voice.

The girl raised her eyes—and very beautiful eyes they were, too, although they seemed haggard and red, and even then had the traces of tears in them—and looked steadily at him. Even though the man knew that he had been mistaken by her for some one else, there was no start of surprise on her part; he knew, in an instant, that she thought she saw in him the person she wanted.

"Dandy, dear," she said, appealingly—and her voice had a faint touch of the rustic in it—"you promised that you would see me again to-night."

The man had given a faint quick start of surprise, at the mention of the name; he turned away abruptly—partly in order to have time to collect his thoughts, partly to hide his face from her.

"Better and better!" he muttered to himself. "Nearer and nearer! Now—who on earth is this, and

what is Dandy Chater's little game?"

"I can't go down to the village, Dandy," went on the girl piteously. "You know why I can't go. You promised to meet me to-night, in the little wood behind the mill—didn't you, Dandy?"

"Yes—yes—I know," replied the man, impatiently. In reality, in this sudden surprising turn of events, his one object was to gain time—to give such replies as should lead her to state more fully who she was, and what her errand might be. "What then?"

"Don't be hurt, Dandy dear," the girl went on, coming timidly a little nearer to him. "You know how much it means to me—my good name—everything. I was afraid—afraid you might—might forget."

How piteously she said it—and what depth of pleading there was in her eyes! She seemed little more than a girl, and the man, looking at her, felt a certain hot indignation growing in him against the real Dandy Chater, who could have brought tears to eyes which must once have been so innocent. It was not his purpose, however, to undeceive her; he had too much at stake for that; so he felt his way cautiously.

"I shan't forget; you need not fear. I will meet you, as I have promised," he replied slowly.

"You are very good to me, Dandy," said the girl, gratefully. "And you are going to take me to London—aren't you?"

This had evidently been promised by the real Dandy Chater, and Philip Crowdy felt that he must deal delicately with the matter, as he had still much to learn. Accordingly, pitiful though the thing was, he took it half laughingly.

"To London? But what am I to do with you there. Where shall we go?"

She laughed, to please his humour. "Why—Dandy dear—how soon you forget! Didn't you promise that I should go with you to the old place—there, I can see you've forgotten all about it already—the old place at Woolwich—the Three Watermen—near the river; didn't you say we might wait there until to-morrow? And then—Oh, Dandy, the thought of it takes away my breath, and makes my heart beat with joy and gratitude—and then—we are to be married!"

"There is some desperate game afoot here," thought Philip Crowdy to himself, as he stood in the dark road, looking at the eager face of the girl. "Why—in Heaven's name, does he want to meet her in a wood, if he's going to take her to London? I must follow this up, if possible, at any cost." Aloud he said, "Of course—how stupid of me; I'd quite forgotten. And to-morrow Dandy Chater, Esq., and —"

"Patience Miller," broke in the girl, quickly—"will be man and wife—and Patience will be the happiest girl in England!"

"Got her name, by George!" muttered the man to himself. "Poor girl—I hope to goodness the man is dealing fairly with her." Turning to the girl again, he said carelessly—"Let me see, what time did I say we were to meet in the wood?"

"At half-past seven," replied the girl. "You said we should have time to walk across the fields, from there to the station, to catch the last train, without any one seeing us—don't you remember?"

"Yes—yes, I remember," replied the man. "I shan't be late; till then—good-bye!"

He had turned away, and had gone some few paces down the road towards the village, when the girl called piteously after him.

"Dandy—you're not going like that? Won't you—won't you kiss me?"

The man retraced his steps slowly. As, after a moment's hesitation, he put an arm carelessly round her shoulders, and bent his face towards hers, he looked fully and strongly into her eyes; but there was no change in her expression—no faintest start of suspicion or doubt.

"That was a trial!" he muttered, when he had started again towards the village, and had left her standing in the road looking after him. "The likeness must be greater even than I suspected. Now to find Mr. Dandy Chater—or rather—to keep out of his way, until I know what his movements are."

Coming, in the darkness, into the little village—a place consisting of one long straggling street of cottages, running up a hill—he found the road flanked on either side by a small inn. On the one side—the right hand—was the Chater Arms; on the other—the Bamberton Head. Standing between them, and looking up the long straggling street, Mr. Philip Crowdy could discern, in the distance, perched on rising ground, the outlines of a great house, with lights showing faintly here and there in its windows.

"That's Chater Hall—evidently," he said softly to himself. "Now the question is, where is Mr. Dandy Chater? Shall I go up to the Hall, and reconnoitre the position, or shall I try one of the inns? I think I'll try one of the inns; if I happen to drop into the wrong one, and he's there, I must trust to making a bolt for it; if he's *not* there, I think the likeness will serve, and I may hear something which will be useful. Now, then—heads, right—tails, left!"

He spun a coin in the air—looked at it closely—returned it to his pocket—and turned to the left, into the Bamberton Head. Knowing that any sign of hesitation might mean his undoing, he thrust open a door which led into the little parlour, and boldly entered it. There were one or two men in the room, and a big surly-looking giant of a fellow, who appeared to be the landlord. The men exchanged glances which, to the man keenly watchful of every movement, seemed to be glances of surprise; the surly landlord put a hand to his forehead.

"Evenin', Muster Chater," said the man. "'Tain't of'en as we sees anything o' you this side the way,

sir."

"Wrong house," thought Philip Crowdy. "So much the better, perhaps; I am less likely to meet the real man, until I wish to do so." Aloud he said, with a shrug of the shoulders—"Oh—anything for a change. Bring me some brandy, it can't be worse than that at the other shop—and it may be better."

"A deal better, Muster Chater, take my word for 't," replied the landlord, hurrying away to execute the order.

During the time that the stranger sat there, and had leisure to look about him, he became aware of one unpleasant fact. He saw that, however great might be their respect for the mere position of the man they supposed him to be, there was a curious resentment at his presence, and a distrust of him personally, which was not to be disguised. When, having leisurely drunk his brandy, he left the place, to their evident relief, and came again out into the darkness of the village street, he expressed the opinion to himself, in one emphatic phrase, that Dandy Chater was a bad lot. 9

In the strangeness of his position, and in his uncertainty as to what future course he was to take, his interview with the girl, on the road outside the village, had gone, for the time, clean out of his mind; when he looked at his watch, he discovered, to his dismay, that it was nearly eight o'clock. More than that, he did not even know where the wood of which she had spoken was situated, and he dared not ask the way to it.

Trusting to blind chance to guide him, and looking about anxiously over the flat landscape, for anything at all answering the description of a mill, or even of a wood, he lost more valuable time still; and at last, in sheer desperation, remembering that the last train for London started at a few minutes to the hour of nine, he set off, at a rapid rate, for the railway station—running along the road now and then, in his anxiety not to miss it.

"If the real Dandy Chater has kept his promise to the girl, even so far as taking her to London is concerned," he muttered, as he ran on, "they've met in the wood long ago, and are well on their way to the station. I'll follow them; that's the best course. Besides—I don't like the look of that business with the girl; her eyes seem to haunt me somehow. If I miss them at the station, I can at least go on to that place she mentioned at Woolwich, and keep my eye on the man."

The wind and rain were less heavy and boisterous than they had been, and the moon was struggling faintly through driving clouds. As the man hurried along, seeing the lights of the station in the distance before him, a figure suddenly broke through the low hedge beside the road, scarcely more than a hundred yards in advance, and ran on in front, in the same direction. Philip Crowdy, hearing the warning shriek of the train, hurried on faster than before. 10

At the very entrance of the station-yard was a gas lamp, which served to light feebly the dreary-looking muddy roads converging upon it. And, beneath this lamp, the figure which had broken through the hedge, and run on before, had stopped, and was carefully scraping and shaking some heavy wet clay from its boots. Catching a glimpse of the face of the figure, as he hurried past, Crowdy, with an exclamation, drew his hat down well over his face, and pulled his coat collar higher.

There was no time even to get a ticket; Crowdy raced across the booking-office, and reached the platform just in time; wrenched open a door, and jumped in. He heard a shout, and, looking out, saw a porter pulling open another door, while the man who had been so particular about his boots sprang into the train. Then, the door was slammed, and the train, already in motion, steamed out of the station.

Philip Crowdy leant back in the compartment in which he found himself alone, and whistled softly. "This is a new move," he muttered, "Dandy Chater himself—and without the girl. Well, most respectable Great Eastern Railway Company," he added, with a laugh, apostrophising the name of the Company staring at him from the wall of the carriage—"it isn't often that you carry, in one train, two such queer people as you carry to-night!" Then, becoming serious again, he said softly—"But I'd like to know what's become of the girl." 11

When the train reached Liverpool Street, Philip Crowdy remained in the carriage as long as possible, in order to avoid meeting the other man; and, on getting out, discovered to his annoyance that the other man had vanished—swallowed up in the restless crowds of people who were moving about the platforms. However, having one faint clue to guide him, he set off for Woolwich.

The Three Watermen is a little old-fashioned gloomy public-house, situated at the end of a narrow street, which plunges down towards the river, and on the very bank of that river itself. Indeed, it is half supported, on the riverside, by huge baulks of timber, round which the muddy water creeps and washes; and it is the presiding genius, as it were, over a number of tumble-down sheds and out-houses, used for the storage of river lumber of one sort or another, or, in some cases, not used at all. And it is the resort of various riverside men; with occasionally some stranger, who appears to belong to salter waters, and to have lost his way there, in getting to the sea.

Outside this place, Philip Crowdy waited, for a long time, in the shadow of a doorway, debating with himself what to do. Being practically in strange quarters, he had had to enquire every step of the way, both as to his journey by train to Woolwich, and afterwards, when he had reached the place. In consequence, he had lost a very considerable amount of time; and was well aware that, if the man he pursued had come to the place at all, he had had all the advantage, from the fact of knowing the way clearly, and being able to make straight for his destination. Under these circumstances, it was quite impossible for Crowdy to know whether the man was in the place, or, if so, how long he had been there—or even if he had not already left the house. 12

Turning over all these points in his mind, Crowdy wandered, half aimlessly, down a little alley,

which led beside the Three Watermen towards the river. He had just reached the end of it, and was shivering a little, at the melancholy prospect of dark water and darker mud before him, when a man, rushing hurriedly from the direction of the water, almost carried him off his legs; snapped out an oath at him; and was gone up the alley, and into the street, before Crowdy had recovered his breath.

"People seem in a hurry about these parts," he murmured to himself. "Now, I wonder what on earth that fellow was running away from?"

Impelled, half by curiosity, and half by the restlessness which possessed him, he turned and walked some little distance, over a kind of dilapidated wharf, in the direction from which the man had come. The place was quite lonely and deserted, and only the skeleton-like frames of some old barges and other vessels, which some one, at some remote period, had been breaking up, stood up gaunt against the sky. Some darker object, among some broken timbers at the very edge of the water, attracted his attention; he went forward quickly, and then, with a half-suppressed cry, threw himself on his knees beside it.

It was the body of a man, who had apparently fallen just where he had been struck down; the hand which Philip Crowdy touched was quite warm, although the man was stone dead. But that was not the strange part—that was not the reason why the living man, bending close above the dead, stared at the face as though he could never gaze enough.

The faces that stared so grimly, in that desolate spot, into each other—the dead and the living—were alike in every particular, down to the smallest detail; it was as though the living man gazed into a mirror, which threw back every line, even every faint touch of colouring, in his own face.

"Dandy Chater!" whispered Crowdy to himself in an awed voice. "So, I've found you at last!"

ON THE TRACK OF A SHADOW

The man's first impulse was to shout for assistance; his second, to dash hot foot after the murderer; his last, to keep perfectly still, while he thought hard, with all his wits sharpened by the crisis of the moment. For hours, he had been racing across country, and hiding and dodging, in pursuit of this man; and he came upon him lying dead, the victim of he knew not what conspiracy. Instinctively he glanced about him, with the dread of seeing other murderous eyes watching; instinctively sprang to his feet, the better to face whatever danger might threaten.

The thing was so awful, and so unexpected, that the man, for a moment, had no power to face it; indeed, he had started to run from the place, in an agony of fear, when a sudden thought swept over him—arresting his flight, and holding him as motionless as though some mortal hand had gripped him, and brought him to bay.

"Dandy Chater dead!" he gasped. "This puts a new light on things indeed! Dandy Chater dead—and out of the way! Let me think; let me hammer something out of this new horror—let me find the best road to travel!" He sat down among the rotting timbers, and propped his chin in his palms, and stared at the dead man.

"Who am I? Who—in all this amazing world, will believe my story, if I tell it? Dandy Chater out of the way!—My God!—that serves my purpose; that was what I wanted. The game's in my hands; the likeness—"

He started to his feet again, and looked round wildly—looked round, like a hunted man who seeks desperately for some way of escape; ran a few paces, and stood listening; came slowly back again.

"Great heavens!" he muttered softly—"they'll think I murdered him!"

That was a sufficiently sobering thought; he stood still, the better to work out the new problem which faced him.

"Think, Philip Crowdy: you've come across the world, to find this man—to wrest from him that which is your right. His real murderer is by this time far away; you are alone with his body, in a place to which you have tracked him. If Dandy Chater has been lured here, and struck down, as is more than likely in such a neighbourhood, for the mere purpose of robbery, there is not the slightest chance—or a very faint one, at best—of finding the man who struck the blow. On the other hand—how do you stand? Tell your story to the world, and, if they believe it, what must inevitably be said: that by this man's death you benefit—therefore, by logical reasoning, you must have compassed his death. Philip Crowdy—you're in a remarkably tight place!"

Looking at the matter from one standpoint and another, he came to a desperate resolution—even smiled grimly a little to himself, as he bent again over the dead man. Turning the body over, he found that Dandy Chater had been struck down from behind, apparently with a heavy piece of timber which lay near at hand; he must have been wandering at the very edge of the river at the time, for the rising tide was now actually lapping the edges of his garments. Philip Crowdy bent above him and began to search rapidly in the pockets, for whatever they might contain.

"Papers—watch and chain—keys—a very little money," he whispered to himself quickly, as he made his search. "The money I'll leave; some river shark will get that; the rest I'll take. The keys I shall want—also the papers."

Carefully stowing away the things in his own pockets, he rose to his feet, and looked about him. It was very late, and there seemed to be no sign of life, either on land or water, save for the distant muffled sound of the steady beat of a tug, working heavily down stream.

"I can't leave him here; for the body to be discovered would spoil everything. And it wouldn't be particularly nice for Philip Crowdy to be discovered, with Dandy Chater's private possessions in his pockets. Now—what's to be done?"

The perplexing question was answered for him, in an unexpected way. The beat of the tug sounded nearer and louder, and he saw the gleam of the light which hung from its funnel. Behind it, towering high in the darkness, was a great vessel, which it was dragging manfully down the river. While the man stood there, idly and mechanically watching it, with his dead likeness lying at his feet, there came a sudden disturbance in the water; a great wash from the river swamped up all about him, so that he turned, and ran back hurriedly a few paces, out of the way of it.

When he looked again at the spot where he had stood, the body was gone. Some of the timbers, too, among which it had lain, were washing about, and crashing together, at some little distance from the shore. The man ran to the very edge of the water, and strained his eyes eagerly, in search for something else beside timbers; but the darkness was too profound for him to see anything clearly; and, although he ran along the muddy bank—first to right, and then to left—he could discover nothing. He stood alone, in that desolate place, and the dead man was undoubtedly being hurried, with the timbers among which he had fallen, down the river towards the sea.

Presently, the man seemed to realise the full significance of what had happened; touched the papers in his pocket; and stood staring thoughtfully at the ground for a long time.

"There is some strange fate in this," he muttered to himself. "To-night, by accident, I took the place of the real Dandy Chater for a few hours; now I'll take his place—not by accident, but by design. Dandy Chater is dead and gone! Yes—Dandy Chater is dead—but long live Dandy Chater!"

With these words, the man turned quickly, hurried up the alley way into the street, and set off as rapidly as possible in the direction of London.

It was so late, that all public vehicles had ceased running, and the railway station was closed. He did not care to excite attention, by chartering a cab to take him to London, and he stood for some time in one of the main streets—now almost deserted—wondering what he should do. The appearance of a small coffee-house, on the other side of the street, with the announcement swinging outside that beds were to be let there, attracted his attention; the proprietor of it had already closed one half of the double doors, and was standing outside, leaning against the side of the window, and contemplating the street, before retiring from the public eye for the day. Philip Crowdy, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the street, and accosted the man.

"Can I have a bed here?" he asked.

The man looked him up and down for a moment in silence; removed the pipe he was smoking from his lips—blew a long stream of smoke into the air; and finally ejaculated—"Ave yer pick of the w'ole bloomin' lot, if yer like. It's my private opinion that there ain't anybody a sleepin' in beds these times, 'cept me, an' the missis, and the Queen, an' a few of sich like nobbs; leastways, they don't come my way. Walk in, guv'nor."

Crowdy followed the man into the shop—a small and very dingy-looking eating-house, fitted up with boxes along each side. The sight of the boxes reminded him that he had had nothing to eat for many hours; discussing the matter with the proprietor of the establishment, he found that he could be supplied with a light meal within a short space of time. Accordingly, he ordered it, and sat down to await its coming.

He picked up a stained newspaper, and tried to read; but before his eyes, again and again, came the image of the dead face, which had stared into his that night. So much had happened—so much that was wild and strange—within the past few hours, that it all seemed like some horrible unruly nightmare. Yet he knew that it was something more than that; for his fingers touched the papers in his pocket, and the watch that had belonged to the dead man. For a moment, as his hands closed upon them, a sweat of fear broke out upon his forehead, and he glanced about him uneasily.

"It's a desperate game," he muttered. "If the body should be found, and recognised—or if the likeness be not so complete as I have thought—what shall I say—what shall I do? Why—I don't even know what manner of man this Dandy Chater was—or what were his habits, his companions, the places to which he resorted; I know absolutely nothing. Every step of the way I must grope in the dark. And I may betray myself at any moment!"

He dropped the paper from before his eyes, and found, to his astonishment, and somewhat to his discomfiture, that he was being steadily regarded, by a man who sat at the other side of the table. More than that, the man, having his back towards the little inner room where the meal was being prepared, nodded his head quickly, in a familiar fashion, and bent forward, and whispered the following astounding remark—

"Wot—give the Count the slip—'ave yer?"

Philip Crowdy's position, at that moment, was not an enviable one. He was utterly alone, in the sense that, whatever battles lay before him, he had to fight them as best he could, and dared not trust any living soul; worse than all, he must fight them in the dark, not knowing, when he took one step, where the next might lead. Moreover, the man before him was one of the most repulsive looking ruffians it is possible to imagine—a man who, from his appearance, might have been one of those unfortunates described by the proprietor of the place as never sleeping in a bed. His clothes, which had once been black, were of a greenish hue, from long exposure to the weather, and were fastened together, in the more necessary places, by pins and scraps of string. His face, long and thin and cadaverous, had upon it, besides its native dirt, a week's growth of beard and moustache; his hair—thin almost to baldness on the top—hung long about his ears, and was rolled inwards at the ends, in the fashion of some thirty years ago.

Crowdy, after eyeing this man for a few moments in silence, grunted something inaudible, and took up the paper again.

"No offence, Dandy," said the man, somewhat more humbly, and in the same hoarse whisper as before. "Seed yer outside—an' came in arter yer. Agin the rules—an' well I knows it; but there ain't no one 'ere to twig us—is there?"

"Well—what of that?" asked the other, taking his cue from the fellow's humility. "Can't you let a man alone, even at this hour? What the devil do you want now?"

"Don't be so 'asty, Dandy," replied the man, in an injured tone. "It ain't for me ter say anyfink agin the Count—'cos 'e's your pal. But you're young at this game, Dandy, and the Count is a bit too fly. If you wants a fren', as 'll *be* a fren', don't fergit the Shady 'un—will yer?" This last very insinuatingly.

"Oh—so you're the Shady 'un—are you?" thought Crowdy. Aloud he said—"Thanks—I can take care of myself."

"Ah—you wos always 'igh an' mighty—you wos," replied the other, with a propitiatory smile. "It ain't fer me ter say anyfink agin the Count—on'y 'e's a deep 'un, that's all. An' 'e's got some new move on; 'e was a stickin' like wax to you to-night—yer know 'e wos."

Philip Crowdy caught his breath. Here, surely, was some faint clue at last; for it was possible that the man who had been "sticking like wax" to the unfortunate Dandy Chater that night, might have stuck to him to the very last, down by the river's muddy brink. Crowdy was breathlessly silent, waiting for more; he left his meal untouched, where it had been placed, and kept his eyes narrowly

on his neighbour.

But that neighbour had evidently made up his mind to say nothing more; after a pause, he shuffled to his feet, and started to leave the place. As he neared the door, however, he came back again, and bent his face down to Crowdy's ear.

"I say—yer won't fergit Toosday—will yer?"

"What about it?" asked the other, as carelessly as he could.

"W'y—at the Watermen—o' course," whispered the Shady 'un, in a surprised tone. "Ten thirty, sharp. I suppose you'll come wiv the Count—eh?"

"I suppose so," replied Crowdy. "Good-night!"

Left alone, he thrust his plate aside, and sat staring at the table, turning the business over in his mind. In the first place, he had resolved to find Dandy Chater's murderer; on the other hand, if, as was possible, the man spoken of as the Count had anything to do with that murder, it would obviously be impossible for Philip Crowdy to appear before him; the fraud would be exposed at once. Again, it was evident that the late Dandy Chater had kept remarkably queer company; and that, moreover, Philip Crowdy—as the new Dandy Chater—was pledged to meet some members of that queer company, on the following Tuesday, at half-past ten, at the house known as The Three Watermen.

"So far—so good—or rather, bad," he said slowly to himself. "I'm Dandy Chater—for the present, at least; if the man who struck the blow happens to meet me, he'll either die of fright, or denounce me. For the present, I've got to be very careful; I've very fortunately discovered one or two things which may be useful. But how in the world am I to know what Dandy Chater was doing, or meant to do—or what people he knew, or didn't know? At all events, I must put a bold face on the matter, and trust to luck."

It was not until he was undressing for the night, in the shabby little room which had been assigned to him over the coffee-house, that he remembered the interview he had had with the girl, on the road outside Bamberton. He stopped, and stood stock still, with a puzzled face.

"The girl—Patience Miller! I'd clean forgotten about her. Why, Dandy Chater was to have taken her to London, and they were to be married to-morrow. Now, Dandy Chater—or the real one, at least—is at the bottom of the river. But where on earth is the girl?"

He puzzled over it for some time, and finally, finding sleep stealing over him, gave it up, with all the other troublous matters connected with the past few hours, and slept the sleep which comes only to a man who is utterly worn out with fatigue and excitement.

He slept late the next morning, and had time, while he dressed, to consider what his future course of action should be. In part, he had made up his mind the previous night; had studied carefully the dress and appearance of the dead man, with that object—indefinite then, but clear and distinct now—of taking his place. He felt now that the first move in the game must be for him to get down to Bamberton.

"No one in England knows of my existence; only one man, so far as I am aware, knows, beside myself, of the death and disappearance of Dandy Chater. There is no one to suspect; so far as I am concerned, there is everything to gain, and but little to lose. Therefore, Mr. Dandy Chater the Second, you will go down into Essex."

Watchful and alert—ready to take up any faint cue which might be offered him—suspicious of danger on every hand, Philip Crowdy got back to London; made some slight purchases, with a view to changing his dress; and started for Chater Hall. Arriving at the little railway station, he returned, with grim satisfaction, the salutes and nods of recognition which one and another bestowed upon him; got into the fly—the only one the station boasted—and was driven rapidly to his future home.

It was a fine old house, standing in most picturesque grounds—a place which bore the stamp of having been in the same family for many generations. Mr. Philip Crowdy rattled along the drive which led to the house, with very mixed feelings, and with a heart beating unpleasantly fast.

"I need all the luck I've ever possessed, and all the impudence with which nature has endowed me," he thought. "Why—I don't even know my way about my own house—shan't know where to turn, when I get inside, or what the servants' names are. And I wish I knew what sort of man Dandy Chater was—whether he bullied, or was soft-spoken—swore, or quoted Scripture."

The fly drew up, with a jerk, at the hall door, which was already open. A young servant—a pleasant-looking lad, of about twenty years of age, in a sober brown livery, ran out quickly, with a forefinger raised to his forehead, and opened the door of the fly.

"Morning, sir," said this individual, in a voice as pleasant as his face. "Hoped you'd telegraph, sir, and let me drive over for you."

Crowdy alighted slowly, looking keenly about him. "I hadn't time," he said, gruffly—being convinced, for some strange reason, that the late Dandy Chater had been of a somewhat overbearing disposition. He walked slowly up the steps, and into Chater Hall.

There his troubles began; for, in the first place, he did not even know his room—did not, as he had already suggested, even know which way to turn. In desperation, he laid his hand on the knob of the first door he saw, and walked boldly in.

He found himself in what was evidently the dining-room. He turned, as he was passing through the doorway, and beckoned to the young servant, who had taken his hat and coat, and who was

lingering in the hall.

"Here, I want you," he said. His quick eye, roving round the room, had seen a pipe on the mantelshelf, and a spirit stand on an ancient Sheraton sideboard. "Get me a whiskey and soda, and bring me those cigars—the last lot I had."

The servant placed the spirit stand at his master's elbow, and hurried away to complete the order. Philip Crowdy leaned back in his chair, and laughed softly, when he thought of how well he was carrying the thing off. "I must be as natural as possible," he muttered. "That was a good move about the cigars."

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The servant reëntered the room, bringing the cigars, and a letter which he handed to Crowdy.

"Brought this morning, sir, quite early," he said.

Philip Crowdy, after a moment's hesitation, broke the seal, and read the following astounding note

"Dearest Dandy,

"You shall have your answer, sooner even than I promised. I do trust you; I do believe in your capacity for the better things of which you have spoken. I will marry you, when you like, and with a glad heart. Come and see me to-morrow night, and we can talk about it comfortably.

"Yours loyally,

"Margaret Barnshaw."

Philip Crowdy dismissed the servant, with a wave of the hand, and sank into a chair helplessly.

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BETTY SIGGS BECOMES ALARMED

Philip Crowdy felt, however, that there was no time to waste in vain speculation; he had plunged into a mad business, and it must be carried through at all hazards. Moreover, the more he came to think about it, the more the strong nature of the man rose up, to assist him to confront his difficulties. Essentially cool and calculating, he saw his desperate position, and saw, too, how the house of cards he was erecting might be fluttered down at a breath. At the same time, with the daring of a desperate man, he took the thing quietly, and determined to advance step by step.

Everything seemed to be in his favour. In the first place, there was evidently no suspicion, in the mind of any one he had met yet, that he was not the man he claimed to be—Dandy Chater; in the second place, the young servant who had first admitted him gave him the very clue he needed, and at the very outset. Coming into the room, immediately after Crowdy had finished reading the letter, this man asked:

"Excuse me, sir—but Mrs. Dolman would like to know whether Mr. Ogledon is coming down to-day?"

Philip Crowdy gathered his wandering wits, and faced the question. "Mrs. Dolman—that'll be the housekeeper," he thought, rapidly. "But who the devil is Mr. Ogledon?" After a moment's pause, he looked up, and said aloud—"Can't say, I'm sure. You'd better send Mrs. Dolman to me."

The young man went away, and the housekeeper presently came bustling in. She was a trim, neat, precise old lady, with a certain dignity of manner belonging to her station. She inclined her head, and folded her hands, and hoped that "Master Dandy" was well.

"Old servant—been in the family all her life," thought Crowdy. Aloud he said—"I really can't say, Mrs. Dolman, whether Mr. Ogledon will be here to-day or not. By the way, Mrs. Dolman"—this, as a brilliant idea struck him—"I think I shall change my room—my bedroom, I mean."

The good woman raised her hands in astonishment. "Change your room, Master Dandy! Why—I never heard the like! What's the matter with the room, sir?"

"Oh—nothing the matter with it; only I want a change; one gets tired of anything. Just come upstairs with me, and I'll show you what I mean."

Mrs. Dolman would have stepped aside, in the doorway, to allow him to precede her; but he waved her forward impatiently, and she went on ahead, and up the broad staircase, with her gown held up delicately in two mittened hands.

"Now," thought Philip Crowdy, with a chuckle, "I shall know where I sleep."

The old lady went before him, and softly opened the door of a room on the left hand—Crowdy taking careful note of its position. It was a beautifully furnished room, with huge old-fashioned presses in it, and with everything arranged with a view to comfort.

"There couldn't be a better room, Master Dandy," urged the old lady—"and you've slept in it as long almost as I can remember. There's your dressing-room opening out of it, and your bath-room beyond that—nothing could be more convenient, Master Dandy. If you moved into the Yellow room, the outlook is pretty, it can't be denied—but it ain't to be compared to this. Of course, Master Dandy, you'll do as you like—but I—"

Philip Crowdy had achieved his object. He looked round the room for a moment, and shrugged his shoulders. "No—after all, I think you're right. It was only a whim of mine; I'll stay here."

As he seemed disposed to remain in the room, the housekeeper quietly took her departure, and closed the door. Crowdy threw himself into an armchair, and laughed softly. He felt that he was advancing rapidly; every fresh pair of eyes which met his, and in which he saw no gleam of suspicion, gave him confidence. His one desire was to do everything which the late Dandy Chater had been in the habit of doing, and, on the other hand, to do nothing which would seem strange or unusual. And here again luck was with him.

Mrs. Dolman, on retiring from the room, had not closed the door so carefully as she had imagined; the sound of two voices, in low converse, came to his ears.

"What's brought 'im 'ome in such a 'urry?" asked the first voice—evidently that of a woman. "I thought 'e was goin' to be away about a week."

In the second voice, which replied in the same low tone, but somewhat aggressively, Crowdy recognised that of the young man-servant, who had already waited upon him. "Well—I suppose Master can do as he likes—can't he?"

"Lor'—some of us soon gits put out, don't we, Mr. 'Arry," replied the woman.

"Good. Now I know *his* name," muttered Crowdy to himself. Whistling loudly, he strode across the room and pulled open the door abruptly. The distant flutter of skirts announced that the woman had taken fright and fled.

"Harry," he said, turning back when he reached the head of the stairs—"I'm going out."

The man seemed, he thought, to look at him rather narrowly—almost frowningly, in fact. "To the Chater Arms, sir?" he asked.

"Yes—I may look in there," replied Crowdy carelessly, and wondering somewhat at the evidently well-known habits of the late Dandy Chater. "I shall be back in time for dinner."

Mr. Philip Crowdy took his way downstairs, selected a cigar with much care, and strolled out, after taking a walking stick from its place in the hall.

"A dead man's house—a dead man's cigar—a dead man's walking stick!" he said to himself, as he went down the long drive. "I don't like it; it smothers me. And yet—and yet——"

He did not finish the sentence; some thought was evidently running in his mind, to the exclusion of everything else. He turned away from the village, and made his way across some fields, and sat down, in the winter sunlight, on the footstone of a stile. Looking cautiously about him, he pulled from his pocket the papers he had taken from the body of Dandy Chater.

There was a cheque book, with one cheque filled up, even to the signature, but still remaining in the book. There was a pocketbook, with various entries in regard to betting, and to sporting engagements generally. And there were one or two letters, in the same handwriting as that seen by him that day. These last he read carefully.

They were couched in terms of friendly advice, and even of remonstrance—with sometimes a little note of anger to be read between the lines. Yet they breathed a very true and very disinterested affection, and were, in every way, full of true womanly feeling.

"Ah—Margaret Barnshaw—(sometimes she signs herself 'Madge,' I see)—that's the lady who's going to marry me—which is more than I bargained for, when I stepped into Dandy Chater's shoes. Well, I'll go through these more carefully later on. Now, as it's evident that I am expected at the Chater Arms, I'll make my way there."

He did so; to the accompaniment of friendly nods, and rustic curtesying and salutations. But at the Chater Arms he received a shock.

It was a bright little place—much better and more cleanly kept than the house he had patronised on the previous day. From its well sanded floors to the black beams which crossed its ceilings, it was a picture of comfort and prosperity. And, seated behind the hospitable-looking bar, was the neatest and trimmest landlady imaginable.

Yet it was precisely this landlady—or the sight of her—which gave Mr. Philip Crowdy such an unpleasant shock. As he entered the door, and she turned her head to look at him, he had but one glance at her; yet that glance was sufficient to sweep him back through many years, and across many miles of land and sea. If the woman had risen calmly and awfully from the grave, her appearance could not have been more startling to the man.

The landlady, for her part, appeared to be troubled in no such fashion by his appearance. She nodded—somewhat curtly, he thought—and evidently saw in him merely the idle Dandy Chater she had been in the habit of seeing almost daily for years past. Recognising the importance of keeping a steady hand upon his emotions, Philip Crowdy nodded in reply, and approached, and leaned over the bar.

"Afternoon, Master Dandy," said the woman, fixing her eyes again on her work. Yet how familiar her voice was in his ears—and how he longed to jump over the bar, and take her portly person in his arms!

"Good-afternoon," he responded. "And I wonder," he thought—"what your name is now!"

There was a long pause; and then, in sheer self-defence, he ordered something to drink, adding, at the same time—"It's so deadly dull up at the Hall, that I thought I'd look down to see you." He stopped lamely, wondering if she expected him to say anything else.

"Very kind of yer, Master Dandy," she retorted quickly, flashing her black eyes at him for a moment, as she set his glass before him. "Wouldn't yer like to step into the parlour, Master Dandy?" she added. There was no graciousness about the speech, and she was evidently in a bad humour.

"Thanks—I think I shall do very well here," replied Crowdy. "And, if you only knew, old Betty, whose eyes are looking at that dear old grey head of yours, at this moment, I think you'd jump out of your skin." This latter, it is scarcely necessary to add, passed through his thoughts only, and not his lips.

Presently, to his astonishment, the old woman, after making several false starts, got up quickly, and came round the bar, and faced him; he saw that there was some extraordinary excitement upon her; he could hear one foot nervously beating the ground.

"Master Dandy," she said, in a voice little above a whisper—"I must speak to you!"

On the instant, the man felt that she had made some discovery—that she knew he was not Dandy Chater. But, the next moment, he saw that this was a matter which had been consuming her for some time, and had now boiled up, as it were, and could be held no longer—some grievance which she imagined she had against Dandy Chater. Knowing that he had a part to play, he spoke lightly and easily.

"Well—I'm here; speak to me, by all means," he said, with a little laugh.

"Not here—not here, Master Dandy," she said, hurriedly. "If you would be so kind as step in here, there ain't likely to be no one in this time o' the day, Master Dandy." She indicated, as she spoke, the door of the little parlour near at hand.

"As you will," replied Crowdy; and he followed her into the room, inwardly wondering what was going to happen.

Inside the room, he seated himself upon a table, and looked questioningly at her. She was evidently at a loss how to proceed, for a few moments, and stood nervously beating her fingers on the back of a chair. When, at last, she broke the silence, her question was a startling one.

"Master Dandy—for the love of God—where's Patience Miller?"

The man stared at her in amazement. He knew the name in an instant—remembered the interview, in the darkness and the rain, upon the road outside the village—almost felt again, for an instant, the warm pressure of the girl's lips upon his. He shook his head, in a dazed fashion.

"How on earth should I know?" he asked, slowly.

"How should anybody know better, Master Dandy?" she retorted, in the same suppressed excited voice. "Master Dandy—I'm an old woman, and poor Patience, 'avin' no mother of 'er own, 'as turned to me—natural-like—these many years. There's been w'ispers 'ere, an' w'ispers there, this ever so long; but it was only the other night as I got it all from 'er." The good woman was quivering with excitement, and her fingers were beating a rapid tattoo on the back of the chair.

"All what?" asked Crowdy, faintly.

"The 'ole story, Master Dandy," she replied promptly. "Ah—it ain't no use your tryin' to deny it, sir; I knows the truth w'en I 'ears it—'specially w'en it comes to me wi' tears an' sighs. You've led 'er wrong, Master Dandy—you know you 'ave; and now—wot's become of 'er?"

"I tell you I know nothing about the girl," replied Crowdy, doggedly.

The old woman threw up her grey head, like a war horse, and looked defiance at him. "Then, Master Dandy," she said fiercely—"if yer turn me and old Toby out in the road, I've got to tell yer a bit o' my mind. You're a Chater—and you've got the Chater blood in you, I suppose—because I knowed your blessed father and mother, now in their graves. But there it ends; for you've got some other black heart in you, that never belonged to them. There's not a man or woman, in the countryside, but wot won't shake their 'eads, w'en they 'ears your name—an' well you knows it. Oh—if on'y my boy 'ad lived, wot a Chater 'e would 'ave been!"

For some hidden reason, the man seemed strangely moved by that last despairing phrase from her lips; indeed, as she bowed her old face down on her hands, with a moan, he made a sudden movement, with outstretched arms, as though he would have taken her within them and comforted her. But when, a moment afterwards, she looked up, with the former stern expression settling on her features, the man was simply watching her keenly, with his hands thrust in his pockets.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, slowly. "What about your boy?"

She hesitated for a moment, even glancing round at the door behind her; then came a little nearer to him.

"I ain't never said anything about it, Master Dandy, because I thought the story was dead and buried like my poor boy—an' I didn't think as 'ow talkin' about it would do anybody any good. But it don't matter now; an' I'd like you to know, Master Dandy, that for all your pride—your wicked pride—you wouldn't 'ave no right to be standin' 'ere, as the master of Chater 'All, if my poor boy 'ad lived."

The man was watching her, more keenly than ever; for the sake of appearances, however, he let a smile play round his mouth, and then broke into a laugh.

"Ah—you may laugh, Master Dandy. Wot if I tell you that you had a brother—an elder brother, Master Dandy, though only by a matter of minutes."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the man; though only for the sake of appearances again—for he had heard the story from her lips, a long, long time before.

"The truth!" she exclaimed. "Not *one* child, Master Dandy, came into the world at Chater Hall, w'en you was born—but *two*—twins; an' the other boy was the first. But your father was crazy on that one idea; I'd often 'eard 'im say that if ever twins came, 'e would find means to git rid of one of them. It was all done quiet and secret-like; ole Cripps was doctor 'ere then—an' a drunken little rascal 'e was, though sound in 'is work. 'E'd 'ave done anything for money—that man; an' pretty 'eavy 'e must 'ave been paid by your father for it. As for me—the Lord forgive me—I'd a notion of starting at the other side of the world, and making a business. So your father sent me off, with five hundred pounds, and the eldest boy—the eldest, because 'e seemed the weakest. 'I won't 'ave two boys, to fight over the property, an' cut it up after I'm dead an' gone,' says your father."

"Well—and what became of the boy?" asked Crowdy.

"Went to Australia, 'e did, the blessed mite—an' growed fine and strong—lookin' on me as 'is mother, an' 'avin' my name, as it was then—Crowdy; Philip Crowdy, we called 'im. Then I met Siggs—my Toby—an' we 'adn't been married a year, an' I was full of care an' anxiety, over a little one o' my own—w'en Philip disappeared. 'E was ten then, an' I told 'im the story, on'y a week or two afore 'e went—your father bein' dead, an' my lips sealed no longer."

"A pretty story, Mrs. Siggs," replied Philip. "And you never heard anything about this boy again?"

"Never," she replied, sadly. "We did everyfink we could to find 'im; but we was livin' on the very edge of the bush at that time, an' the poor lad must 'ave got lost in it, an' starved to death. Even men 'ave done that," she added, with her apron at her eyes.

"And why did you return to England?" he asked, in the same dull level voice.

"I couldn't abear the place, after we'd lost 'im; an' things went wrong, an' Siggs an' me lost most of

our money. Besides, I was always longin' for the old place where I was born; an' so at last we come 'ome, without nobody bein' a bit the wiser, an' took the Chater Arms—an' settled down."

Carried away by the remembrances of years, Betty Siggs had forgotten the real object with which she had started the conversation; she remembered it quickly now, and her tone changed. But it was no longer harsh; the remembrance of her boy, as she called him, had softened her, and she turned to the graceless Dandy Chater—as she imagined him to be—and spoke pleadingly.

"Master Dandy, won't you listen to an old woman—won't you tell me w'ere I can find this poor girl—Patience; won't you—"

Philip Crowdy, remembering suddenly the part he had to play, got up impatiently, and made for the door.

"I tell you," he said, with a frown, "that I know nothing about her. And please let us hear no more of such idle tales as these. Your boy, indeed!" He laughed, and swung out of the place into the road.

Yet, as he walked along, his heart was very sore, and his face was troubled. "Poor old Betty!" he muttered to himself—"she thinks I'm Dandy Chater—and a blackguard; what would she think, if she knew that the boy she lost in the bush was saved, after all; and that he stands here to-day, in his dead brother's place, and under his dead brother's name? What would she say, if she knew that I am her boy, as she calls me—Philip Crowdy—or Philip Chater?"

A SUNDAY TO BE REMEMBERED

The sun, shining brightly over the trim lawns which stretched before Chater Hall, seemed to declare, deceitfully enough, the next morning, that winter was dead and buried, and spring come in full force to take its place. Philip Crowdy—or Philip Chater, as we must now call him—waking in the unaccustomed softnesses of a great bed, and gradually opening his eyes upon the luxuries about him, awoke as gradually to a remembrance of his new position; looked at it lazily and comfortably, as a man will who wakes from deep sleep; and then came to a full realisation of all it meant, and sat up quickly in bed.

"Yes," he muttered softly to himself, nodding his head as he looked about him—"I am bound to admit that when one has slept—or tried to sleep—for a few weeks, in a narrow berth aboard an evil-smelling sailing vessel, with a scarcity of blankets, and no pillows worth mentioning, this"—he looked round the big bed, and smiled—"this is a very decent apology for Heaven. And—such being the case—I want to stop in Paradise as long as possible."

He stretched out his hand, and pulled the bell-rope. In a moment or two, the young servant Harry made his appearance—coming softly into the room, and regarding his master with some surprise. Philip Chater, quick to take his cue from the other's expression, glanced carelessly at Dandy Chater's watch, which hung near his head.

"Rather early, Harry? Yes—I know it is; but I'm restless this morning. I shall get dressed at once. Put me out some things—you know what I want; I don't want to be bothered about it—and get my bath ready. Oh—by the way"—he called out, as the young man was moving away—"I shall go to church."

The servant stopped, as though he had been shot—even came back a pace or two towards the bed. The expression of his face was such an astonished one, that Philip knew that the day, from a point of view of good luck, had begun very badly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Harry, with something very like the flicker of a smile about his mouth.

"I said," repeated Philip Chater, slowly and emphatically, being determined to brave the matter out—"that I should go to church."

"Very good, sir." The young man had recovered his composure, and walked through into the adjoining bath-room, after another quick glance at his master.

"Ah—Dandy Chater was evidently not a professing Christian," muttered Philip. "I'm half sorry now that I suggested going; but I suppose it's best to take the bull by the horns, and plunge among the people I shall have to meet as rapidly as possible. Well, if they single me out as a lost sheep, and call me publicly to repentance, I can't help it. But I shouldn't be surprised if the living were in my gift; in which case, they may be disposed to forgive me, and treat me leniently."

Finding, to his satisfaction, that the clothes belonging to the late Dandy Chater fitted his successor as accurately as though made for him, Philip went down to breakfast in an improved frame of mind. After breakfast, when he lounged out into the grounds, there came another of those little trials to his nerves, which he was destined thereafter often to experience.

Coming near to the stables, a dog—a fine animal of the spaniel breed—leapt out suddenly, with joyous barks, to meet him; came within a foot or two—sniffed at him suspiciously—and then fled, barking furiously. Turning, in some discomfiture, he came almost face to face with the servant Harry, who was looking at him, he thought, curiously.

"Something the matter with that beast," said Philip, as carelessly as he could. "Have it chained up." Turning away, and reëntering the house, he said softly to himself—"The moral of which is: keep away from the animals. They are wiser than the more superior beings."

It was with very uncomfortable sensations in his breast that Philip Chater—after discovering, in his wanderings, a small gate and path leading direct from the grounds to the churchyard—strolled carelessly across, and entered the church. He had been careful to wait until the last moment, when the slow bell had actually ceased, before venturing inside; and it was perhaps as well that he did so. Fortunately for himself, he came face to face, just inside the porch, with an ancient man, who appeared to act as a sort of verger or beadle; and who was so much astonished at his appearance, and stepped so hurriedly backwards, that he almost tripped himself up in the folds of his rusty black gown. But he recovered sufficiently to be able to shuffle along the church, towards the pulpit, and to pull open the door of a huge old-fashioned pew, like a small parlour, with a fireplace in it. Philip was glad to hide himself within the high walls of this pew, and to find himself shut in by the ancient one.

But his coming had created no little stir. Although, having seated himself, he could see nothing except the windows above him, and a few cracked old monuments high up on the walls, he was nevertheless aware of a rustling of garments, and sharp whisperings near him. When, presently, he rose from his seat with the rest of the congregation, he discovered that his eyes, passing over the top of the pew were on a level with certain other eyes—gentle and simple—which were hurriedly withdrawn on meeting his own. Moreover, immediately on the opposite side of the aisle in which his parlour-like pew was situated, was another pew, in which stood a young girl—very neatly, but very beautifully dressed; and, to his utter embarrassment, the eyes of this young girl met his, with a gaze so frank and kindly, and lingered in their glance for a moment so tenderly and sweetly over the top

of that high pew, that he wondered who in the world the young girl was, and what interest she had in Dandy Chater.

Again—another disquieting circumstance arose; for, when he got to his feet a second time, and almost instinctively looked again in the direction of those eyes which had met his so frankly, his glance fell on another pair, near at hand—a black pair, looking at him, he thought with something of sullenness—something of pleading. This second pair of eyes were mischievous—daring—wilful—kittenish—what you will; and they were lower than the other eyes, showing that their wearer was not so tall. And the strange thing about them was, that they flashed a glance, every now and then, at the other eyes—a glance which was one wholly of defiance.

“The devil’s i’ the kirk to-day,” thought Philip Chater—“and I wish I knew what it was all about. Dandy—my poor brother—you’re at the bottom of the river; but you didn’t clear up things before you went.”

The clergyman was a dear old white-haired man, who also gave a glance, of kindly sympathy and encouragement, towards the big square pew and its single occupant; and who preached, in a queer quavering old voice, on love, and charity, and all the sweeter things which men so stubbornly contrive to miss. And he tottered down the steps from the pulpit, with yet another glance at the big pew.

The service ended, Philip Chater sat still—and, to his infinite astonishment, every one else sat still too. Worse than all, the whispering, and the faint stirring of dresses and feet, began again.

“I wonder what on earth they’re waiting for,” thought Philip, craning his neck, in an endeavour to peer over the top of the pew. The next moment, the door of the pew was softly opened, and the ancient man who had ushered him into it, stood bowing, and obviously waiting for him to come out. In an instant, Philip recognised that the congregation waited, in conformity with an old custom, until the Squire should have passed out of church.

Rising, with his heart in his mouth, the supposed Dandy Chater faced that small sea of eyes, every one of which seemed to be turned in his direction; and every face, instead of being, as it should have been, familiar to him from his childhood, was the face of an utter stranger.

He thought hard, while he gathered up Dandy Chater’s hat and gloves—harder, probably, than he had ever thought before, within the same short space of time. And then, to crown it all, as he stepped from the pew came the most astounding event of all.

The young girl with the kindly eyes looked full at him, as he stepped into the aisle; hesitated a moment; and then, with a quick blush sweeping up over her face, rose to her full height—(and she was taller than the average of women)—and stepped out into the aisle beside him. Quite mechanically, and scarcely knowing what he did, he offered her his arm; and they passed slowly out of the church together, with the silent congregation, still seated, watching them.

Not a word was spoken by either of them, until they had almost crossed the churchyard; glancing back over his shoulder, Philip could see the people emerging from the porch, and breaking up into groups, and evidently talking eagerly. And still no word had been said between the two chief actors in this amazing scene.

At last, the girl turned her face towards his, (she had seemed quite content to walk on beside him, in silence, until this moment) and spoke. Her voice, the man thought, was as beautiful as her face.

“Well, Dandy dear—have you nothing to say to me?”

In a flash, light broke in upon Philip Chater. From the girl’s appearance, style of dress, and easy assurance with him, in the presence of a church-full of people he felt that this must be the Margaret Barnshaw whose letter he had read—the letter in which she promised to marry Dandy Chater. But, not being sure even of that, or of anything indeed, he decided to grope his way carefully; looking at her with a smile, he asked lightly—“What would you have me say to you?”

She clasped her other hand on his arm, and her face suddenly grew grave, and, as he thought, more tender even than before; her voice, too, when she spoke again, had sunk to a whisper.

“Nothing—not a word, dear boy,” she said. “You’ve said it all so many times—haven’t you? And I’ve sent you back, with a heartache—oh—ever so many times. But—from to-day, we’ll change all that; from to-day, we’ll begin afresh. That’s why I took your arm, before them all, to-day—to show them my right to walk beside you. Did you understand that?”

There was no reasonable doubt now that this was the Madge of the letter; unless the late Dandy Chater had made proposals, of a like nature, in other quarters. He answered diplomatically.

“Yes—I think I understood that,” he said. “I—I am very grateful.”

“Do you remember,” she went on, “what you said to me when last we met—when I told you you should have your answer definitely? Do you remember that; or have you forgotten it, like so many other things?”

“I said so many things, that perhaps I may have forgotten which one you refer to.” Philip Chater felt rather proud of himself, after this speech.

“You said—‘I’m going to be a stronger, better fellow than I have ever been before; you shall find me changed from to-night; you shall find I’ll be a new man.’ Do you remember that?”

It was a trying moment; and, for the life of him, Philip Chater found it difficult to keep his voice quite steady, when he answered, after a pause—“Yes—I remember.” For this girl, with her hands locked on his arm, and with her eyes looking so trustfully and confidingly into his, had heard those

words, of repentance, and hope, and well-meaning, however lightly said, from the lips of a man she would see no more, and who was now washing about horribly, a disfigured thing, with the life beaten out of it. And the man who stood beside her, in his place—in his very clothes—was a fraud and an impostor.

“Did you mean it, Dandy dear? Was it true?”

He answered from his heart, and spoke the truth, in that instance at least. “Yes—God knows it was true,” he said.

They had left the road, and had turned through a gate into a little wood, which belonged, he supposed, to his own estates. Here, quite suddenly, she stopped, and held out both her hands to him. Very gravely—and, it must be said, with a growing anxiety which matched an expression in her own eyes—he took the hands in his, and looked, as steadily as he might, into her face.

“Dandy—my dear boy—as friends—as man and woman—we have said some bitter things to each other—have parted in anger, more than once. You have been wild, I know—have made some blunders, as we all must make them, in our poor journey here on earth. But you have sworn to me that those old tales, about you—you and Patience Miller—forgive me; I promised never to mention the subject again; but I must—I *must*—you have told me that all that story was mere malicious gossip. As Heaven is my witness, I believed you then; but tell me once again. Tell me,” she pleaded—“that no woman need hide her face to-day, because of you; tell me that—reckless and foolish as you may have been—no living creature weeps to-day, because of you.”

He paused for a moment; a dozen new thoughts and ideas seemed to dart through his mind. The name she had mentioned had brought again to his memory the scene with the girl, on the road outside the village, on the night of his first visit to Bamberton—the girl whom Dandy Chater was to have married, and who failed, after all, to accompany him to London. But, for all that, he had a double reason for setting her doubts at rest, and for speaking clearly and without fear. In the first place, the man to whom the question referred was dead, and beyond the reach of any earthly judgment; in the second place, Philip Chater was, of course, blameless in the matter. Therefore he said, after that momentary pause—

“Indeed—no living creature weeps to-day on my account, Madge”—he felt that he must attempt the name, and was relieved to observe no start of surprise on her part. “I have had your letter; I—I wanted to thank you for it. I wish I could think that I deserved—”

“Hush, dear,” she broke in, hurriedly. “All that is past and done with; haven’t I said that we start from to-day afresh. Perhaps—who knows?”—she laughed happily, and came a little nearer to him—“perhaps I’ve helped to change you—to make a new man of you. And I won’t believe a word that any one says against you—never any more!”

With a gesture that was all womanly, and all beautiful, she leaned suddenly forward, and kissed him on the lips. Then, as if half ashamed of what she had done, she released her hands, and, with a quick half-whispered—“Good-bye!”—sped away from him through the wood.

Philip Chater stood looking after her, for a few moments, in a bewildered fashion; then, presently, sat down on a bank, and let his head drop into his hands.

“Oh—it’s horrible!” he groaned. “Here’s a woman—one of the best in the world, I’ll be sworn—holding my hands, and kissing my lying lips, and swearing that she loves me, and will make a new man of me; and the man she loves lies at the bottom of the river. I thought this was to be a mere question of money; a matter of ‘the king is dead—long live the king!’ but when it comes to lying steadily to a woman, it’s another business altogether. Yet, what am I to do?” He sat up, and stared hopelessly before him. “If I tell her that her lover is dead, I break her heart, and endanger my own neck; on the other hand, to keep up this mad game requires more subtlety than I possess, and the Devil’s own cheek. What a mighty uncomfortable pair of shoes I’ve stepped into!”

He heard a sudden rustling among the leaves near at hand, and the next moment a girlish figure sprang out, and confronted him. Raising his head slowly, from the ground upwards, he saw, first of all, a very trim little pair of shoes—a gay little Sunday frock—a remarkably neat waist—and so up to a mischievous face, shaded by a wide hat; and in that face were set the pair of black eyes which had looked at him in so audacious a manner in church, and which were regarding him roguishly enough now.

“Mr. Dandy Chater”—the voice of this girl of about eighteen was imperious, and she was evidently not a person to be trifled with—“I want to know what you mean by it?”

The situation was becoming something more than merely humorous. Philip Chater pushed back his hat, and gazed at her in perplexity; and, indeed, it must be admitted that, to be accosted in this fashion by a young lady, of whose name he was entirely ignorant, was enough to try the stoutest nerves. However, remembering all that was at stake, and seeing in this girl one of a very different stamp to the woman from whom he had just parted, he asked, with what carelessness he might—

“And what’s the matter with *you*?”

The girl stamped her foot, and began to twist the lace scarf she wore petulantly in her hands. “As if you didn’t know!” she exclaimed, passionately. “I’ve watched you, since you walked out of church—and I know why you went *there*—for the first time since you were christened, I should think. Surely, you remember all you said to me last week—when”—the little hands were very busy with the lace scarf at this point—“when you kissed me.”

Philip Chater rose hurriedly to his feet; advanced to the girl, and took her by the shoulders. “Look here, my dear,” he said—and his voice was really very plaintive—“if I kissed you, I’m very sorry—I

mean—I ought not to have done it. In fact, there are a lot of things I've done in the past—and I've left them behind. You're a very pretty girl—and I'm quite sure you're a good girl; but you'd better not have anything more to do with me. It's only too evident that I'm a bad lot. I think—in fact I'm quite sure—you'd better go home."

He turned away, and walked further into the wood. Looking back, after going a little way, he saw her crouched down upon the ground, weeping as if her heart would break. Hastily consigning the late Dandy Chater's love-affairs to a region where cynics assert they have their birth, he retraced his steps, and raised the girl from the ground. She was very pretty, and seemed so much a child that the man tenderly patted her shoulder, in an endeavour to comfort her.

"There—don't cry, little one. I know I've been a brute—or, at least, I suppose I have; and I——"

"No—you haven't," sobbed the girl. "And please don't mind me; you'd better go away; you'd better not be seen with me. He'll kill you, if he finds us together—he said he would."

"Who'll kill me?" asked Philip, glancing round involuntarily.

"Harry." She was still sobbing, but he caught the name distinctly.

"And who the deuce is Harry?"

"As if you didn't know! Why, Harry, of course—your servant. And he'll keep his word, too."

AN HONEST SAILOR-MAN

Philip Chater sat over the fire late that night, in a futile endeavour to see his new position clearly, and to decide upon the best course of action for him to adopt. Try as he would, however, the thing resolved itself merely into this: that Dandy Chater was dead, and that he (Philip), together with possibly one other man, alone knew of his death; that Philip Chater was accepted by every one—even the most intimate—as the real Dandy; that, in that capacity, he was already engaged to be married—had left a girl crying in the wood, that very day, whose name he did not know, but who obviously regarded him with considerable tenderness; and that there was, in addition, a certain Patience Miller, whom he was to have married, and who, up to the present, was not accounted for in the least.

“Altogether—a pretty state of affairs!” he muttered to himself, as he sat brooding over the fire. “Why, I don’t even know whether I’m rich or poor, or in what my property consists; I may meet Dandy Chater’s dearest friend to-morrow, and cut him dead; and, equally on the same principle, embrace my tailor, and hail him as a brother! I can’t disclose my real identity, for the question would naturally be asked—‘If you are not Dandy Chater, where is he?’ and I should have to tell them that he was dead—murdered—and I don’t know by whom. No; there’s not the slightest doubt that you are in a very tight place, Phil, my boy, and your only chance is to go through with the business.”

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His thoughts strayed—and pleasantly, too—to the girl of more than average height, with the eyes that had looked so frankly into his own; he found himself remembering, with something very like a sentimental sigh, that she had held his hands, and had kissed him on the lips; remembered, too, with some indignation, that the man she supposed she loved had arranged to take another woman to London, on that very night of his death, and to marry her.

“The late Dandy Chater,” he said, softly—“twin-brother of mine, in more than ordinary meaning of the word—either you are a much maligned man, or you were a most confounded rascal. And it’s my pleasing duty to discover, by actual experience, whether you were saint or sinner. And I don’t like the job.”

Inclination, no less than the actual necessity for following out that part of the tangled skein of his affairs, led his thoughts, on the following day, in the direction of Madge Barnshaw. Yet, for an engaged man, he was placed in a decidedly awkward position, inasmuch as that he did not even know where the lady lived. Having recourse to her letter, he found it headed—“The Cottage, Bamberton.”

“Now—where on earth is ‘The Cottage’ situated,” muttered Philip to himself in perplexity, as he surveyed the letter. “As a matter of fact, she ought to have supplied me with a map, showing exactly how far away it was, and the best method of reaching it. Let me see; what shall I do? I know; I must sound the individual who is thirsting for my blood—Harry.”

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Acting upon this resolution, he rang the bell, and requested that the young man should be sent to him. On his appearance, a brilliant idea struck Philip Chater, and he said, airily—“I am going to see Miss Barnshaw. I think I’ll drive.”

Harry, whose eyes had been respectfully cast in the direction of the floor, gave a visible start, and looked up in perplexity at his master. “Drive, sir?” he stammered.

“What an ass I am!” thought Philip. “She probably lives within sight of this place; and the man will think I’m mad.” Aloud he said—“No-no; what on earth am I thinking about? I mean, I’ll go for a drive—now; and call on Miss Barnshaw this afternoon.” He got up, and crossed the room restlessly; stopped, and spoke to the servant over his shoulder—spoke at a venture.

“By the way, Harry—I suppose you’ll be thinking of getting married one of these days—eh?”

There was so long a pause, that he looked round in astonishment at the other man. Somewhat to his discomfort, the servant was gazing frowningly at the carpet, and tracing out the pattern on it with the point of his boot. Looking up at his master, still with that frown upon his face, he said slowly—“Don’t see as it matters, one way or another, Master Dandy, to anybody but myself. I don’t see any likelihood of it at present. What time might you be ready to drive, Master Dandy?”

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Very wisely, Philip decided to leave the matter alone. It was in his mind—in the earnest desire which filled him to do something to straighten out one of the many tangled things Dandy Chater had left behind him—to say something to this young man, in reference to the love affair at which he only guessed; but so many other matters claimed his attention, and demanded to be straightened out, that he decided to leave the thing alone for the present. Therefore he said, somewhat abruptly—“Very well; I have no wish to interfere. And, after all, I shall not drive.”

Harry hesitated for a moment, as though he would have said something more; but finally turned, and left the room. In a few moments he returned, however, and announced—

“Miss Vint to see you, sir.”

Momentarily wondering whether this might not be some one else who loved him, Philip requested that the lady might be shown in; and there fluttered into the room an elderly lady—small, and thin, and dry-looking; indeed, she gave one the impression, from her appearance, of having lain by unused for a long time, so dusty was her aspect. She had hair of no decided colour, and features of no decided form; and her clothing—even her gloves—were of a neutral tint, as though, from long

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preservation, whatever of original colour they had possessed had long since faded out of them. But, with something of sprightliness, she came rapidly up to Philip, and seized his hand in both her own.

"My dear Mr. Chater—shall I, under the special circumstances, say—my dear Mr. Dandy?—"

"My dear lady," replied Philip, lightly—"say what you will."

"How good of you!" she exclaimed, and squeezed his hand once more. "The dear girl has but just told me all about it; and I hurried over at once, to offer my congratulations—"

"Now I wonder," thought Philip—"which dear girl she means?"

"For I felt that I must not lose a moment. Madge has not confided in me, as she might have done, and I have had to guess many things for myself. But I must say, Mr. Dandy"—she shook a rallying forefinger at him—"that you are the shyest lover I have ever known."

"Indeed—I am very sorry—" he began; but she checked him at once.

"Well—we'll forgive you; only I had been given to understand that you were very different—that's all. However—that is not what I came to say. Standing in the position I do, as regards Madge, I feel that I must make some formal acknowledgment of the matter. Therefore, I want you to dine with us—let me see—to-morrow night?"

"I shall be delighted," replied Philip, mechanically. "By the way—what is to-morrow?"

"Tuesday, of course," she responded, with a little laugh. "Ah—love's young dream! I suppose all days are alike to you—eh?"

The mention of that day had brought to his mind a certain appointment he had. He remembered the hoarse whisper of the Shady 'un in his ear, in the coffee-house in Woolwich—"Toosday-ten-thirty sharp."

"I'm afraid," he said, slowly—"I'm afraid I can't manage to come to-morrow. I—I have to be in London; a—a business appointment. I'm extremely sorry. Could you—pray forgive the suggestion—could you arrange for some other evening—or could you bring—Madge—here?"

"I had quite set my heart on to-morrow," said the old woman, in an injured tone.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," replied Philip again. "But I shall be coming in to see Madge, and we can make arrangements. If you are going back now," he added, "please let me walk with you."

"Thank you—but I am going down to the village," she replied, as she backed towards the door.

She was gone, before he could quite make up his mind what to do or say; he watched her through the window helplessly, as she walked away from the house.

"Done again!" he muttered, savagely. "I thought I should be able to find out where the cottage was. Well—I must trust to luck, I suppose; I haven't committed any very great errors yet."

It seemed possible, however, that he might commit an error which would lead to his undoing, in this matter of the appointment at "The Three Watermen." In the first place, if, as he suspected, the man responsible for the death of Dandy Chater was the man known as "the Count," it would be obviously impossible for Philip Chater to keep the appointment. Yet, on the other hand, Philip was determined to know more of the surroundings and associates of the late Dandy Chater than he knew already; indeed, to do so was absolutely necessary. He had set his feet upon that road which was plainly marked "Deception"; and, wheresoever it might lead, there must be no turning back now. As Dandy Chater he stood before them all; as Dandy Chater he must stand while he lived, or until the cheat was discovered. Philip Crowdy was as dead as though he had never existed.

"There's another man, too, with whom I am supposed to be in company—Ogledon, I think the name was; I wonder who *he* is? However, I'll go to London—and I'll attend this meeting, if it be possible."

Early next morning saw him on his way to the station—this time with some pomp and ceremony, for he drove a smart dog-cart, and was attended by Harry. The occupants of other vehicles, passing him, were respectful or familiar, according to their grade; and he answered all salutations discreetly.

"I'm beginning to like this," he said, as he leant back in the corner of a first-class carriage, and lit a cigar. "I wish I knew how much money there was in the bank, or what property I had generally; I must make enquiries. At present, things are decidedly pleasant—and there's an element of danger about the business that gives it a flavour. There's that girl, too—Madge; but I'm not sure that I quite like that. I've taken a kiss from her lips that was never meant for me; and yet"—he shook his head over it, and sighed heavily—"I'm very much afraid that I'm a little bit in love with her; I know, at any rate, that I dread very much seeing those eyes change from tenderness to contempt—from kindness to reproach or scorn. Well—we must hope for the best."

Cheerfully hoping for the best, he made his way to Woolwich, as night was coming on, and headed for the little public-house by the river. Being still doubtful, however, what course to pursue, he paced a little side street near at hand for some time, trying to make up his mind whether to put in an appearance at "The Three Watermen," at the time appointed, or not. He was so deep in his reflections, that he failed to notice one or two lurking figures, in the shadow of the houses, on the opposite side of the way; until another figure—not by any means a lurking one, but one which took up a great deal of the pavement, with a rolling gait, and roared very huskily a stave of a song as it came along—lurched towards him; when, in an instant, the lurking figures became very active.

Two of them darted across the road, and bolted in front of the rolling figure; another ran swiftly behind, and embraced the singer with much tenderness round the neck. Before Philip had had time

to take in the situation completely, the four figures formed one struggling heap upon the pavement, with the central one—the singer, but roaring out quite another tune now—making lively play with fists and feet.

Philip Chater rushed in to the rescue; seized one assailant—dragged him to his feet—preparatory to immediately knocking him off them; and looked round to see how the battle was progressing. The man who had been attacked—and whose musical tendencies were stronger, apparently, than any alarm he might reasonably be expected to feel—had collared one of his opponents round the neck, in return for the delicate attention bestowed upon himself, and was hammering away lustily at him, making the blows keep time to the tune of “The Death of Nelson,” the first bars of which he solemnly chanted, while he performed his pleasing duty.

The man who had been so unexpectedly knocked down had got to his feet, and, together with the third member of the gang, had bolted away; presently the stranger, tiring of his exercise, and having got, perhaps, as far through the tune as memory served him, released his victim’s head, although still keeping a tight hold on his collar. Philip, being close beside him when he did this, saw revealed, in the features of this footpad of the streets, the Shady ‘un.

“Now—you bloomin’ pirate!” exclaimed the musical one, shaking his man until it seemed as though he must shake him altogether out of his dilapidated clothes—“wot d’yer mean by runnin’ a decent craft down like that, in strange waters—eh? An’ to land a man like that, w’en ‘e’s a bit water-logged—leastways, we’ll call it water-logged, for the sake of argyment. If it ‘adn’t ‘ave been for this ‘ere gent, I don’t know—” Here the man, turning for a moment towards Philip, stopped in amazement, and almost let his victim go. The Shady ‘un, too, was regarding Philip curiously.

“Look ‘ere, Mr. Chater,” began the Shady ‘un, with a whine—“you’ll swear as ‘ow I’m a ‘ard workin’ man, as just stepped forward for to ‘elp this gen’leman, as was set on by two thieves—won’t yer, Mr. Chater?”

“‘Ere—‘old ‘ard,” broke in the man who held him. “Who the dooce are you a callin’ ‘Mr. Chater’? I’d ‘ave you know that this ‘ere gent is a mess-mate o’ mine—an’ ‘is name ain’t Chater at all; it’s Crowdy—good ole Phil Crowdy—if so be as ‘e’ll excuse the liberty I takes. You an’ yer bloomin’ Chater! W’y—they’ll be a callin’ yer the Dook o’ Wellin’ton nex’, Phil.” As he spoke, he stretched out his disengaged hand, and grasped that of Philip Chater.

Philip hurriedly interposed, when he saw that the Shady ‘un was about to speak. “It’s all right, Captain,” he said; “I certainly know this man, and there may have been a mistake. Don’t you think—pray pardon the suggestion—that he’s had a pretty good thumping, whether he deserved it or not?”

“Well—p’raps ‘e ‘as,” replied the Captain, somewhat reluctantly. “But let me give you a word of advice, my friend,” he added to the abject Shady ‘un. “W’en nex’ you tries to ‘elp anybody, wot’s bein’ run over—or run through—by a couple of thieves, don’t show your kindness of ‘eart by a thumpin’ ‘im in the wes’kit; to a man o’ my figger, it *ain’t* exactly a kindness. An’ don’t call gentlemen out of their names—‘cos you’ll find—”

“That’s all right, Captain,” interrupted Philip; “this man knows me as Mr. Chater.” To the Shady ‘un, who had been that moment released, he whispered quickly—“Get off as fast as you can—and think yourself lucky.”

The man needed no second bidding, and in a moment Philip Chater and the man whom he had addressed as the Captain were left standing alone in the street. The Captain was a big, burly individual, with a round good-tempered face, surrounded by a fringe of dark whiskers; whatever temporary exaltation he might have been labouring under, before the attack upon him, he was now perfectly sober, and looked at his friend with considerable gravity, and with a slowly shaking head.

“My boy—far be it from the likes o’ me to interfere with a mess-mate, or with ‘is little fancies—but I don’t like this ‘ere sailin’ under false colours. I did know a ‘ighly respectable ole gal, wot called ‘erself the Queen o’ Lambeth; but she lived in a retirin’ way, in a lunatic asylum. W’y, if so be as your name is Crowdy—w’y, I ask, call yourself by such a common name as Chater?”

“I can’t explain now,” said Philip, hurriedly. “A number of strange things have happened, since last I saw you. You mustn’t think badly of me, old friend; but, for the present, I *am* sailing under false colours, and am known to all the world as Chater. Moreover, I must impress upon you to forget that you ever knew any one of the name of Crowdy, or that he ever sailed with you, on board the good ship ‘Camel,’ from Australia for England. Come—forget all about me, for the present—and tell me about yourself, and when you sail again.” He glanced at his watch, as he spoke, and found that it was exactly ten o’clock. “I have half an hour to spare, Captain; where shall we go, for a chat?”

“W’y—to tell the truth, I’m a cruisin’ in strange waters, an’ ‘ave lost my bearings a bit,” replied the Captain, looking about him with a puzzled air. “If so be as you knew of a place, where the grog wasn’t watered over much, with a locker for a man to rest ‘isself on, it might be better than the streets—eh?”

Accordingly, they set out together, to find a house of refreshment; and presently came upon one, in a quiet street, with a tiny bar—empty—round a corner. Here they called for what the Captain termed “a toothful,” and were soon deep in conversation.

“You haven’t told me yet when you sail again,” said Philip, when he had parried the other’s questions as much as possible. “I suppose you’ll be quite glad to get on board again.”

“Well—not exactly,” replied the Captain—whose name, by the way, was Peter Quist. “I’m a thinkin’ of givin’ it up altogether. Yer see—it’s this way,” he added, confidentially. “I’ve put by a bit of money, an’ I’m thinkin’ of settlin’ down ashore. The sea’s been my business—an’ I want somethin’

else for my pleasure. I'm a thinkin'," he went on slowly, pulling meditatively at his whiskers—"I'm a thinkin' of goin' in for the showman line, with a dash of the circus. I was always fond of 'osses—an' I believe as fat ladies and two-'eaded babbies is profitable—always supposin' as Mrs. Quist don't get spiteful about the fat ladies. I'm now a lookin' out for anybody as 'as got a good second-'and circus to dispose of, with a fat lady or two goin' cheap."

"Well," said Philip, laughing, "I hope you'll succeed. But what brings you into this part of the world?"

"I come down 'ere, to see a man I thought 'ad got wot I wanted. I've put up at a nice little place, down near the river; I was makin' for it, w'en I run foul of them land-sharks."

"What place is it?" asked Philip.

"Well, Mr. Crowdy—leastways, I should say—Mr. Chater—they calls it 'The Three Watermen.'"

AT THE SIGN OF "THE THREE WATERMEN"

For a few moments Philip Chater sat gazing at Peter Quist, as though he half suspected that the man knew more than his guileless face proclaimed, and that he was playing a joke upon him. Seeing, however, that his friend appeared to be completely in earnest, and that he had simply answered his question as straightforwardly as it had been put, he merely remarked, in a surprised tone—

"Why—what takes you to 'The Three Watermen'?"

"I was a cruisin' about in these parts—bein' near the water, and so comin' more nateral like—w'en I turned in there for a toothful, an' found they let beds. Wantin' a bed—(for man were not made to sleep on the 'ard ground)—I took it. It looks over the river, an' is cheap—which is a consideration."

It suddenly occurred to Philip that he might well make use of this man, to discover whether or not it would be safe to venture into the place that night. If, as the Shady 'un had suggested, he was expected to arrive in company with the man known as the Count, and if, further, that man knew anything of the murder of the real Dandy Chater, Philip's position was precarious in the extreme; indeed, safety only lay in the company of those people who were ignorant of the death of his twin brother.

"Look here, Quist," he said, after a little hesitation—"I want you to do me a favour. At this same house where you have a lodging, a certain man is likely to be, in whom I have an interest. I can't explain the full circumstances; but I am playing a desperate game, for a large stake, and it is essential that I should know whether this man is there or not; at the same time, I do not wish him to know—or, indeed, any one else—that I am making enquiries. Will you—to oblige a friend, drop a casual enquiry as to whether the Count is there?"

Captain Quist stared at him, in open-mouthed astonishment. "'Ere—old 'ard, Phil, my boy; I'm afraid the beds at that 'ouse will be a bit too expensive for me. I thought it was a place w'ere a ordinary sailor-man might get a cheap lodging; but w'en it comes to a matter of counts——"

"Oh—you needn't be afraid," replied Philip, laughing. "The man I want is not, I suspect, a count at all—I think it's merely a nickname."

The Captain shook his head, and looked at his friend with a troubled countenance. "Phil, my boy," he said, "I'm very much afraid you're a gettin' into bad company. In the ordinary course o' nature, I don't mind a little scrap in the street, or bein' butted violent; but w'en you knows the lubber I'd nabbed, an' 'e knows you by another name—I don't like it. An' now, 'ere's another of 'em, also under a wrong flag. No, Phil"—the Captain was very emphatic about the matter—"I do not like it!"

"Very well," said Philip, somewhat testily, "I won't trouble you. If I had not been acting quite innocently in the matter, I would not have asked you to do this for me. I have no doubt——"

"Stop—stop!" broke in the Captain. "I never said I wouldn't do it; I only expressed my opinion. Peter Quist ain't the man to go back on a mess-mate, as you've found afore to-day. Trust in the old firm, Phil, my boy, and if there's a count anywheres about Woolwich, I'll lay 'im by the 'eels, as soon as look."

Philip Chater urged upon him, however, the necessity for proceeding with caution; and, above all, making his enquiries in as casual a fashion as possible. It being now very near the time for keeping the appointment, the Captain, accompanied by Philip, set off on his quest; they parted near to "The Three Watermen," Philip remaining in the shadow of an archway, to await the Captain's return.

In a very short space of time—although it seemed long to the waiting man—Peter Quist hove in sight; coming along in a very mysterious and cautious manner, and keeping well within the shadow of the houses. He dived into the archway, dragging Philip with him; and there stood for some moments, in the semi-darkness, breathing hard, and shaking his head with much solemnity.

"Well," asked Philip, impatiently—"what news?"

"I tell yer wot it is, young man," replied the Captain, slowly—"you'll be a gettin' me into serious trouble, you will—alonger yer counts and things. I stepped into the bar, an' I orders a drop of rum—just to ease conversation a bit; an' I ses—off-hand like—"As the Count come in?" The man was a drawin' the rum, and 'e ses, without lookin' up—"No—nobody ain't seen the Count for some days.' Then 'e looks up—seems surprised—an' ses—"Who wants to know?" I tells 'im a pal o' mine was wishful to know about the Count. Well—Phil, my boy—the man looks at me very 'ard; and presently I see 'im a w'isperin' to some one, wot 'ad slipped in on the quiet—an' a lookin' at me. So I strolls out—careless like—an' I 'adn't gone far, w'en I found as I was bein' followed—and by the bloke as called you 'Mr. Chater' not an hour ago."

"What—the Shady 'un?" exclaimed Philip.

"Shady or not, there 'e was; but I soon settled 'is business," replied the Captain. "As 'e was a sneakin' past a little shop, with steps a leadin' down into it, I turns round on a sudden, an' lands 'im one on wot I may call the fore-'atch—an' down 'e tumbles into that shop. In fact," added the Captain, with a fine air of carelessness—"the last I see of 'im, 'e was on 'is back, an' the female wot kep' the shop was a layin' into 'im proper with a broom, an' yellin' 'Fire!' Accordingly, I left 'im, an' cut on 'ere, as 'ard as I could."

"You're a good fellow," said Philip, gratefully. "I must go on to 'The Three Watermen' at once, and

trust to luck to bring me safely out of it again. If you will come on later, and take your lodging there in the ordinary course, I shall be glad; I might want to have such a friend near me. But, should you see me there, don't recognise me, or take the faintest notice of me, unless I call upon you to do so. Will you undertake to carry out my wishes?"

70

Captain Peter Quist, though evidently much disturbed in mind, nodded slowly, in token that he would do as he was asked; and Philip Chater set out alone for "The Three Watermen."

Guessing that the late Dandy Chater was probably well acquainted with the house and its inmates, Philip, for his own protection, determined to put on a moody sullen demeanour, and to lounge at the bar of the place until he was accosted by some one; he felt that he could take his cue more readily, if he led those who imagined they knew him to speak first.

In pursuance of this plan, he roughly pushed open the door with his shoulder, and lounged into the place—looking about him with an air that was half insolent, half quarrelsome. Making his way to the bar, he gave a curt nod to the man behind it, and gruffly ordered some brandy.

The man who presided there regarded him with a sort of obsequious leer; and took the opportunity to lean across the bar, and whisper huskily—"All gone upstairs, Mr. Dandy."

"What the devil do I care where they've gone?" asked Philip, roughly.

"They'll be expecting you, Mr. Dandy," ventured the man, after a pause.

"Well—let them wait till I choose to go," said Philip, in the same reckless manner. "I've been looking for the Count."

"And he ain't come," replied the man. "They expected he'd come along with you. There's something big afoot"—the man leaned over the bar to whisper this—"hadn't you better go up and see them, Mr. Dandy?"

71

As a matter of fact, that was precisely what Philip Chater most desired to do; but, in the first place, he did not know which way to turn, or where to go; and, in the second, he had no intention of presenting himself before whatever company might be expecting Dandy Chater, in such a place as that, unannounced and unprepared. Therefore, trusting to the good-fortune which had not yet deserted him, he waited to see if some event would not occur, to prepare the way for him.

"I don't care what's afoot," he said; "I'll finish my brandy, and go when I choose."

The man—who appeared to be the landlord of the house—advanced his face a little nearer, across the bar, and spoke in a wheedling tone. "I'm going up myself, Mr. Dandy," he said, in a whisper; "perhaps you'd like to come up with me?"

"Oh—if you like," replied Philip, carelessly; although this was exactly what he wanted. He felt that, from the tone the man had adopted, it was evident that the late Dandy Chater had been a difficult man to deal with. He determined to make what capital he could out of that.

The man—after calling gruffly to a draggled female in the inner room to come and attend to the bar—dived under the wooden flap in the counter, and stood beside Philip. The latter slowly and coolly drank his brandy, and even stopped to bite the end from a cigar, and light it—looking frowningly at the other, who stood waiting patiently at the foot of some dark stairs for him; all this to give himself time, and to carry out, as fully as possible, that idea, of which he had somehow possessed himself, that the late Dandy Chater had been a remarkably disagreeable fellow, and that it was necessary for his successor to keep up the character.

72

At last, having spun out the time as much as possible, he lounged after his guide, up the stairs; and was ushered by him, through a low doorway, into a room which, from the appearance of the single long projecting window, which took up nearly all one side, evidently gave on to the river. Round a table in this room, four men were seated, with their elbows upon it, and their heads very close together; the heads were turned, as the door opened, and a murmur—apparently of relief and recognition—broke simultaneously from the four throats. Philip Chater, observing, in that momentary glance, that they were all men of an inferior type to himself, from the social standpoint, carried off his entry with an air, and swaggered up to the table—still with that heavy insolence of bearing, which had seemed to have so good an effect upon the landlord below.

"Well," he said, taking a seat at the table, and coolly blowing a cloud of smoke into the air—"what do you want with me?"

He noticed, as he spoke, that the man who had guided him to the room appeared to have a direct interest in whatever proceedings were afoot; inasmuch as that he took a seat at the table, quite as a matter of course.

73

"Where's the Count?" abruptly asked one man—a tall, sandy-haired fellow, with grey eyes far too close together to make his countenance a pleasing one.

"The very question I was going to ask you," replied Philip. "Do you suppose I'm the Count's keeper?"

"Well—he left here with you last week," replied the same man, in an injured tone. "We supposed he'd been staying with you as usual."

"Then you supposed something that didn't happen," said Philip, in the same surly tone as before. "I've seen nothing of him since—since that night." Then, a sudden thought occurring to him, he added—"I left him—down by the river."

A shrill voice—piping, and thin, and unsteady—broke in from the other end of the table. Its owner was a little man, with a figure as thin and shrunken and unsteady as his voice—a man with no linen

to speak of, who yet had whiskers, which had once been fashionable, on either side of his grimy face, and whose shaking hand affectionately clasped a glass of spirits. "A split in the camp—eh?" he squeaked out. "Ogledon and his cousin had a row—eh?"

Philip Chater was learning many things and learning them quickly. If Ogledon—the man expected at Chater Hall by the housekeeper—and the man known as the Count were one and the same person, and that person Dandy Chater's—and his own—cousin, what had they both to do with these men, and why had both disappeared—the one murdered, and the other missing?

74

"Hold your tongue, Cripps," exclaimed the man who had spoken first. "The Count knows his own business—and ours; I expect he'll be here presently—"

("I sincerely hope he won't," thought Philip.)

"In the meantime, if you're sober enough, Doctor"—this to the man he had addressed as Cripps—"we'll get to business."

Philip Chater pricked up his ears; he remembered, at that moment, that Betty Siggs, in her disclosure to him of the story of his own life, had mentioned a certain drunken little doctor, of the name of Cripps, who knew the secret of his birth, and had been paid to keep it.

"You'll be glad to know, Dandy," went on the man, who appeared to act as a species of leader—"that the business at Sheffield has turned up trumps. We don't mention names, even amongst ourselves; but the haul was bigger than we anticipated. The man behind the counter—you know who I mean—gets a thousand for handing over the flimsies; and gets it pretty easily, too, to my mind. The rest is divided out between us, except for your share and Ogledon's. Here's yours"—he handed a packet across the table to Philip—"and perhaps, as the Count hasn't turned up, you'd better take his as well. Here it is."

Philip took the two packets, inwardly wondering what they contained, and thrust them into his pocket, with a nod. As he did so he became aware that three of the heads had drawn together, and that whispers were passing amongst them, while three pairs of eyes were glancing in his direction. Quick to fear that some suspicion of his identity might have come upon them, he watched them covertly; while such phrases as—"The Count said nothing about him"—"I suppose we'd better tell him"—"He'll know the country, at any rate"—and the like, fell upon his attentive ears.

75

"Now—what the devil are you plotting there?" he asked, angrily.

The sandy-haired man raised his head, and spoke hesitatingly. "Well, you see, Dandy, it's a little matter the Count mentioned last week—but he didn't say anything about you. He's told off the men for it—and it's a matter of a few diamonds, and only women to deal with. But the Count's particular about one of the women—a young one—coming by no hurt. After all, it's down your way, and he must have meant you to know what was going on. It's for Friday, as soon after midnight as may be. There's Briggs here, and myself, and Cripps, in case of accidents. He wrote the address, and a rough plan, so that we might find it without making enquiries. Here you are." He tossed across the table a folded piece of paper as he spoke.

Philip's hand had closed on the paper, and he was in the very act of opening it, when a confused sound of scuffling and angry voices came from outside the door. Looking round quickly, with the others, he saw the Shady 'un dart in—breathless and panting—and make a hasty attempt to close it; indeed, he got his back planted against it, while some one outside was evidently striving hard to burst it open, and pointed with a shaking hand at Philip Chater.

76

"Treachery—by God!" he gasped. "He's put the splits on us!"

The man's appearance, no less than his voice, and the words he had uttered, were sufficient to cause alarm. He was battered and bruised from his two encounters with the Captain, and with the woman into whose shop he had been so unceremoniously thrust, while his clothing—such as it was—had been almost torn from him, by his struggle with the unknown person against whom he still frantically held the door. At the very moment he spoke, this unknown one, proving too much for him, burst into the room, sweeping the Shady 'un aside, and revealed himself as Captain Peter Quist, without a hat, and in a great state of perspiration, disorder, and excitement.

Finding himself unexpectedly in the presence of half-a-dozen men—one of whom was Philip Chater—in addition to his late assailant, the Captain stopped, and looked round in some astonishment. At the same time, the Shady 'un, in an agony of spite and fear, backed away from him, and continued to gasp out his indictment.

"Seed 'em together all night, I 'ave. Dandy sent 'im 'ere, a spy in' out fer the Count—an' I—"

Philip Chater did not care to risk waiting to give any explanation to that company. In point of fact, he feared the honest Captain more than any man there; for he dreaded lest he should blurt out his knowledge of a certain Philip Crowdy, who was done with, and left behind in the past. Therefore, edging quickly near to the Captain, while he still kept his eyes on the other men, who had risen to their feet, he whispered quickly—

77

"Make a bolt for it!"

There hung from the ceiling, over the table, a single gas jet, with a naked light; Philip, with a quick movement, snatched the ragged hat from the head of the Shady 'un, who stood at his elbow, and dashed it straight at the light; the room was in darkness in a moment. He heard the men falling about, and stumbling over the chairs, as he darted through the doorway, and plunged down the stairs, with the Captain almost in his arms—for that gentleman had waited for him. The men were actually on the stairs, when the two fugitives darted through the bar, and into the street.

Rightly guessing that no attempt would be made to pursue them in the open street, Philip and his companion, after doubling round one or two corners, came to a halt, and sat down on some steps outside a church, to review their position.

"This comes of gettin' into bad company, Phil," said the Captain drearily, when he had recovered his breath. "A 'at—bought off a Jew gentleman, with nice manners, only last week; a brush and comb—the brush a bit bald, and the comb wantin' a noo set of teeth; to say nothink of a night garment, 'emmed by the Missis, and marked with a anchor on the boosum—all lost at 'The Three Watermen.'" 78

"I'm very sorry," replied Philip, "but I think we got off pretty cheaply as it was. But I don't think we had better be seen in company; those fellows only saw you for a moment, and will scarcely be likely to recognise you, should you meet them."

"I don't want to meet 'em," said the Captain. "I saw that Shady chap in the bar, and thought 'e was on the lookout for me again—so I chivvied of 'im upstairs."

They parted for the time, after Philip Chater had impressed his address upon the Captain's mind, with many injunctions to talk about him as little as possible. Philip, after walking for nearly an hour, found a quiet hotel, and gladly got to bed. At the last moment, before his eyes closed, he remembered the two packets which had been given him, together with the piece of paper the sandy-haired man had tossed to him, and which latter he had thrust into his pocket. He jumped out of bed, re-lit the gas, and took them from the pockets of his clothing.

The first packet, when he broke it, he found contained bank-notes—for small and large amounts—to the total of three thousand five hundred pounds; the second packet held the same amount. Dropping these hastily, he caught up the scrap of paper, and hurriedly unfolded it.

It was a roughly-drawn plan of certain roads and paths, together with two little squares—one at the top right-hand corner, and one at the top left-hand corner. The square at the right was marked—"Dandy's house—easily seen from village street." The other square was marked—"The Cottage." 79

And the address pencilled upon it was—"The Cottage, Bamberton."

MASTER AND SERVANT

For a long time, Philip Chater sat staring, in a stupefied fashion, at the packets of bank-notes, and at the paper he held in his hand. He was at first utterly at a loss to understand why such a sum of money should have been paid into his hands, together with a similar sum for the mysterious man, his cousin, known as the Count. Gradually, however, a light began to dawn upon him; remembering the talk about diamonds, and about the young girl who was to receive no hurt, the horrible business began to piece itself together in his mind, bit by bit. Once again he seemed to be looking into the evil faces, in that upstairs room in the low public-house at Woolwich; saw that the giving of the packets—one for himself, and one for his cousin—had been but a dividing of the spoils of some successful robbery. More than that, the paper seemed to point to the fact that another robbery was planned, at the house of Madge Barnshaw.

Everything seemed to point to this. The affair had evidently been arranged by this same mysterious man Ogleton; and that he was a frequent visitor to Bamberton was obvious, from the mention made of him by Mrs. Dolman, the housekeeper, on the day of Philip's first journey to Chater Hall. Again, the mention of the young girl who was not to be hurt—of the fact that they only expected to have to deal with women—all pointed to robbery, to which possible violence was attached.

81

"My God!" whispered Philip to himself, in an awed voice—"I've landed straight into the midst of some tremendous conspiracy. Dandy Chater—the Squire—the gentleman; yet Dandy Chater, the associate of thieves and footpads. Dandy Chater, professing love for the sweetest woman in the world, yet mixed up with scoundrels who are plotting to rob her! And, in the meantime, where in the world is this precious cousin of mine—Ogleton? Did Dandy Chater meet his death at that man's hands, and is that the reason the fellow keeps out of sight? Well—two things are clear; in the first place, I have in my possession notes, which I believe to be stolen, to the extent of seven thousand pounds; and, in the second place, the gang from whom I escaped to-night are to plunder Madge's house, on Friday next, soon after midnight."

He began to pace up and down the room, in an agitated fashion; stopped suddenly, with a look of resolution on his face.

"Well—one thing is clear; I must find the rightful owners of this money, and restore it—Great Heavens—I can't do that! This plunder belongs to Dandy Chater, and he belongs to the gang that stole it—and I—I'm Dandy Chater! Upon my word, I begin to wish that the good ship 'Camel' had struck a rock, somewhere on its voyage home from Australia, and had deposited me comfortably at the bottom of the ocean."

Fully understanding the hopelessness of attempting to do anything, at all events at that time, Philip Chater put the notes under his pillow, and returned the slip of paper to his pocket. He had lain down in bed, with the full intention of putting off all thought until the morrow, when a remembrance of this same scrap of paper brought him suddenly upright in bed, in the darkness.

82

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, softly—"I shall be able to find my way to the cottage easily enough, after all."

He slept soundly through the night, and, quite early in the morning, set off for Bamberton—sending a telegram to "Harry—care of Dandy Chater, Esq., Bamberton," to apprise that respectable young man-servant of the hour at which he desired to be met at the station.

"That's another of the defects of my position," he thought, savagely; "I don't even know the name—the surname, at least—of my own servant. However, if there should happen to be more than one Harry at Chater Hall, I can blame it on the post office, and swear they left out the name."

To his satisfaction, however, the Harry he wanted was awaiting his arrival at the little railway station, with the smart dog-cart in which he had driven before. But, ever on the watch for some sign of suspicion in those about him, Philip Chater noted, with a quick eye, that the pleasant manner of this young servant was gone; that he answered his master's greeting, by merely touching his hat, and without a word in reply. More than that, he seemed to avoid Philip's eyes as much as possible—glancing at him covertly, and, as it appeared, almost with aversion.

83

As they drove in the direction of Bamberton—Philip having the reins, and the young man sitting silently beside him—Philip broke an uncomfortable pause, by asking abruptly—"Anything happened since I went to town?"

For quite a long moment, Harry did not reply; Philip Chater, looking round at him quickly, saw that he was staring straight in front of him, down the long road before them, and that his face was rather white. "No, sir," he replied at last—"nothing has happened."

His manner was so strange—so perturbed, in fact, for his voice shook a little as he spoke—that Philip, scenting danger, guessed that something was wrong, and determined to get out of him what it was, while they were alone together. He turned quickly on the young man, checking the horse's speed as he did so, and spoke quietly, though with a certain strong determination in his voice.

"Come, Harry—something *has* happened; I am convinced of it. You are hiding something from me; what is it?"

Another long pause, while the horse paced slowly along the road, and the hearts of both men beat faster than ordinary. At last, the servant spoke—still without looking at his master. He spoke

doggedly, and as though repeating something he had trained himself, with difficulty, to say.

"There's nothing I'm hiding, Master Dandy," he said, slowly and distinctly—"and nothing has happened—since you went away."

It was evident that nothing was to be got out of him; Philip touched the horse smartly with the whip, causing it to break into its former rapid pace, and said quietly, with something of reproach in his tone—"You *are* hiding something, Harry. I am sorry; I thought you were my friend."

"God knows I am, Master Dandy!" broke from the other, almost with a groan. But he said nothing more, and they swept up the long drive to Chater Hall in silence.

Now, the ill-luck which seemed to have begun to pursue Philip Chater, caused time to hang heavily upon his hands that afternoon, and prompted him to stroll down to the Chater Arms. Truth to tell, he had a very strong desire to pay a visit to Madge Barnshaw—which would have been easy, now that the plan on the scrap of paper was in his hands. But he hesitated, for more reasons than one.

In the first place the natural chivalry of the man rebelled against the thought of taking advantage of the fraud he was compelled to practice upon an innocent woman. Some feeling, stronger than mere interest in her, had begun to stir in his breast, from the time when she had placed her hand upon his arm, in the church, until she had blushing kissed his lips, and fled from him. For this man, so strangely made in the likeness of the dead, and so strangely placed, in the masquerading game he was forced to play, was desperately and bitterly lonely. Surrounded by unknown dangers—necessarily suspicious of every one with whom he came in contact—resenting, as an honest man, the lie he was obliged to live—he craved most earnestly for some sympathy and tenderness. All unconsciously, this woman had given them both to him; and, in the midst even of his remorse that he should be playing so false a game with her, was the natural selfish feeling of his manhood, which cried out—"Let her love me; she will never understand; I am as good, or better, than the man to whom she thinks she is giving her caresses. Born of the same mother, in the same hour, and fashioned so strangely alike—he, the younger, has had all the luxury and beauty of life hitherto; I—the elder—all its hardships and privations. Surely it is my turn—rightfully—now."

Nevertheless, he thrust that thought from him, and resolved to see no more of her than was consistent with the keeping up of the fictitious character he had assumed. And thus it was that, in desperation, and haunted by troublesome thoughts, he betook himself to the Chater Arms.

The moment he entered the door of that respectable inn, he regretted having done so; for, behind the neat little bar, there sat, to his infinite surprise, the young girl whose black eyes had looked at him so reproachfully in church, and whom he had left weeping in the wood. However, he felt that he must make the best of it; and he therefore advanced, boldly and smilingly, and gave her greeting.

The girl was evidently disturbed in her mind by his appearance—yet not unhappily so; she blushed prettily, and rose, with some nervousness, to fulfil his demands. And, just at the moment when, as she was bending to pour out the liquor he had ordered, and, as he lounged on the bar, his own head was necessarily somewhat close to hers, the door swung open, and Harry came in.

The situation was, of course, ridiculous; for, whatever the methods of the late Dandy Chater might have been, Philip had a natural personal objection to drinking in public with his own servant. But, however he might have been disposed to resent it, the sight of the young man's face gave him pause.

It had been white when they drove together in the dog-cart; it was white now—but with a different sort of whiteness. Then, his face had borne the expression of deep emotion—of a struggle to repress something—almost of a deadly fear; now, it was set into a look of stern and ill-suppressed anger. Moreover, he made no attempt to give his master any salutation, respectful or otherwise.

Desiring, at least for the sake of appearances, to assert his position, and being, at the same time, unwilling to wound the lad more than could be avoided, Philip stepped quietly up to him, and, with his back towards the girl, said, in a low voice—"I don't desire that you should be seen here, at this hour of the day. When your duties at the Hall are ended, you can, of course, please yourself—but I can't have you drinking here now."

The once respectful Harry looked at him steadily for a moment, and returned a remarkable answer—speaking in the same suppressed voice as his master.

"I'll please myself now, Master Dandy—and I'm not drinking. I'm here for a purpose."

The nature of the elder man was too strong to be put off, even with such a rebuff as this; his manner changed, and his voice, when he spoke again, had in it the sternness of command.

"You forget yourself," he said; "return at once to the Hall."

The young man, without changing his attitude in the least, shook his head doggedly. "No, Master Dandy," he replied—"I'm going to stay here." His eyes wandered, for a moment, towards the girl with the black eyes behind the little bar.

"Very good. Then you understand that you leave my service from this hour. Is that clear?"

"No, Master Dandy—it ain't clear. I don't leave your service—now, most of all—not if you was to kick me, like a dog, from your doors." He spoke in a hurried, breathless whisper, and, to the utter bewilderment and amazement of Philip Chater, his eyes—full of some mute appeal—had tears in them.

Baffled in earnest now, Philip Chater, after looking at Harry for a moment or two in perplexity, shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. But he had no stomach for the drink the girl had prepared for him; avoiding her eyes, he paid for it, and, without looking at either of them, walked

out of the place.

He felt that some mystery was brooding, behind the extraordinary attitude of his young servant. Remembering the girl's mention of him in the wood, he felt that mere foolish jealousy was at the bottom of the matter; and, knowing that this was one of the difficult legacies left behind by the late Dandy Chater, he accepted it philosophically. At the same time, he was puzzled at the young man's last remark, and at the evident emotion he had displayed. Being in no mood to return to his solitary home, which seemed always full of unfamiliar ghosts of people he had never known, he struck off across some fields, and sat down on the felled trunk of a tree, and was soon lost in unprofitable dreaming.

He was roused from this, by hearing a footstep quite close to him; looking up, he saw the man from whom he had so recently parted. Anger at the thought of being followed, and spied upon, brought him hurriedly to his feet.

"What do you want? What right have you to follow me, in this fashion? I suppose you've come to plead something, in extenuation of your rudeness—eh?" he exclaimed. "I'll hear nothing—I've nothing to say to you."

He turned away angrily, and walked a half-dozen paces; twisted on his heel, and came back again. Harry had not moved; he stood, with his hands clasped tightly together before him, and with his head bowed on his breast. When he spoke, his voice was low, and had a curious mournful ring in it, that struck upon his listener's heart like a knell.

"Master Dandy—I'm only a common country lad, that's seen nothing of the great world, and knows but little of the rights or wrongs of things, more than whatever good God put in my heart can teach me. But I've only known one life, Master Dandy—and that's you!"

He took a half step forward, and stretched out his clasped hands, in mute appeal—dropping them again the next moment. Philip Chater—humbled and awed by the pathetic dignity of the lad—was silent.

"The first thing I remember, Master Dandy, was having you pointed out to me, on your pony, as the young Squire; I used to go out of my way, to watch you cantering along the roads. Then, afterwards, when you took notice of me, and wouldn't have any one else near you, and made me your servant, I was prouder than I can ever express. God forgive me—(but there's no blasphemy in it, Master Dandy)—you were my God to me—my everything! I think I would have been glad to let you thrash me, as you did your dogs, if I could have thought it would please you."

Philip Chater found his voice at last—although it was rather an unsteady one. "Well," he said, with what brusqueness he could muster—"what has all this to do with the matter?"

"Master Dandy," went on the appealing voice—"I'm not a great gentleman, like you—and I can't put my poor thoughts into the right words. But—Master Dandy—won't you—won't you try to run straight with me—won't you let me help you? Master Dandy"—he came a step nearer, in his eagerness—"I'd give—I'd give my life for you!"

"Yes—and yet you'll insult me, because I happen to look at some girl in whom you take an interest," said Philip, slowly.

The lad's figure stiffened, and the appeal died out of his eyes. "Because I love her, Master Dandy," he said. "Because I've got the feelings of a man, and I know that a gentleman like yourself doesn't pay court to a tavern-keeper's daughter, with any good intent."

"Why—what the devil do you mean?" cried Philip, startled for the moment into answering out of his own honest heart.

"Master Dandy—I've stuck up for you through thick and thin—and I'd kill the man who dared to say a word against you. But you know what has been said, about these parts—God forgive me, I'm speaking as man to man, and not as servant to master—and you know that decent mothers warn their girls about you. Master Dandy—I suppose these are gentlemen's ways—at least, I've heard so; and I'd have held my tongue, and done my duty, if so be you had not touched what belonged to me. But she's mine, Master Dandy—and she's a child—and innocent. God in Heaven, man!"—all social distinctions seemed to be swept away, for the moment, in the passion which overwhelmed him—"was not one forlorn woman's life enough for you?"

Staggered by the words, and even more by the tone in which they were uttered, Philip Chater turned upon him swiftly, and caught his arm. "What do you mean? 'One forlorn woman's life!' What are you talking about?"

All the passion had faded from the face of the other man; but the eyes which looked into those of Philip Chater had a horrible deadly fear growing in them.

"Master Dandy—before God, I think I'm the only man who knows it. There is time for you to get away—to hide beyond seas—never to come back to this place, where you have been led to do such wrong. Master Dandy!"—he had fallen upon his knees, at the feet of the other man, and was clasping his dress, in the agony of his appeal—"I knew you when you were a bright faced lad, laughing in the sunshine, and with no stain of blood upon you. Master Dandy—"

"Stain of blood!" cried Philip, recoiling. "What are you talking of? What madness possesses you?"

"No madness, Master Dandy—would to Heaven it might be!" cried the other. "It isn't for me to see into a gentleman's heart, or to know what temptations he may have, above such as I am. But the thing is done, and all high Heaven can't undo it now. Master Dandy—there is yet time to get away, before they find it."

"Will you tell me what you mean?" cried Philip, distractedly.

Harry got up from his knees, and came nearer to his master—looking all about him fearfully first, as though afraid there might be listeners, even in that spot.

"Listen, Master Dandy," he whispered. "Last night—restless, and thinking of you—for you haven't been as kind to me lately as you once were, Master Dandy—I crept out of the house, and went out in the moonlight. I walked a long way, without knowing it—and I came to the wood behind the old mill."

92

Like an echo, there came to Philip Chater certain words, spoken by a girl who called herself Patience Miller, and who had met him on the night of his arrival at Bamberton. As in a dream, too, while the other man went on speaking, he seemed to see a figure dart out into the highway—a figure that afterwards scraped heavy clay from its boots, in the light of a flickering lamp—a figure which now lay at the bottom of the Thames.

"Master Dandy," went on the agitated voice—"I came, by accident, to where she lay, with blood upon her—dead—in the moonlight. Master Dandy"—he put his hands before his face, and shuddered—"say it isn't true, Master Dandy—for God's sake, say it isn't true!"

"What do you mean?" asked Philip, hoarsely, with an awful sweat of fear beginning to break out upon him.

"Master Dandy—in the wood behind the mill—Patience Miller—murdered!"

With a cry, the lad fell at his feet, and buried his face in the grass.

93

TELLS OF SOMETHING HIDDEN IN THE WOOD

Philip Chater was so stunned, in the first shock of the thing, that he did not know what to say, or what to do. Standing, as he did, an absolutely innocent man, he yet had time to recognise that he had taken upon himself the identity of another; and stood answerable, by reason of that, for that other's sins, in the eyes of the world, at least.

He had no doubt, in his own mind, that Dandy Chater had murdered this unfortunate girl. Her words to himself, on the night of his coming to Bamberton—her reminder, to the supposed Dandy Chater, of his promise to marry her—the mysterious appointment made, for that same night, in the wood behind the mill; all these things seemed to point to but one conclusion. Again, the man running, as for his life, to catch the train—and without the girl; her disappearance, from that hour; all these things, too, pointed, with unerring finger, to the common sordid story, ending, in an hour of desperation, in the blow which should rid the man of his burden.

These thoughts flashed rapidly through his mind, even in the few seconds which elapsed after the other man's halting declaration, and while that other man still crouched at his feet. Then, the instinct of self-preservation—the desire, and the necessity, to hide that blood-stained thing, which seemed to point to him—innocent though he was—as surely in death as it would have pointed in life—swept over him. He caught the lad by the arm, and dragged him to his feet; the while his mind was fiercely working, in a wild attempt to settle some plan of action. Even in that hour of danger, a keen remembrance of the part he still had to play was full upon him; in his brutal roughness of voice, when he spoke, he played that part of Dandy Chater, as he imagined Dandy Chater would have played it himself.

"Get up, you fool!" he cried, roughly. "Is this a time to be snivelling here? Suppose she is dead—it was an accident."

Harry sadly but doggedly shook his head. "You won't find many to believe that, Master Dandy," he said. "She lies there—stabbed in the breast. There is a trail of blood for some yards; she must have tried to crawl away—and have bled to death. Master Dandy, can't you see that she will be found; can't you guess what they will say, and whom they will question first? All the village has linked your names, for months past."

"She—it must be hidden," whispered Philip, weakly. "God—man"—he cried, with a sudden burst of petulant anger—"why do you stand staring like that? It may be found at any moment; it may have been found before this!"

"There's no help for it, Master Dandy," replied the other, with a groan—"it must be found, sooner or later. I tell you, you must get away—beyond seas, if possible."

"And draw suspicion on myself at once!" exclaimed Philip. Then, some of the real Philip Chater coming to the surface, and sweeping aside the false personality under which he lived, he added, hurriedly—"But you must have nothing to do with it, Harry; we mustn't get you into trouble. No—I'll take the thing in my own hands, and in my own fashion. Do you keep a silent tongue to every one."

"You need not fear that I shall speak, Master Dandy," replied the lad. "And it may not be so bad, after all; you may yet find a way of getting out of it, Master Dandy."

"A way of getting out of it!" muttered Philip to himself, as he watched the retreating figure of his servant. "There seems but small chance of that. Robbery was bad enough; but this is another matter. She's dead, and cannot speak; even if she were alive, she must point to me as Dandy Chater. And I cannot speak, because the real Dandy Chater is gone, and I stand here in his clothes, and with his very papers in my pockets. Philip, my boy—keep a cool head—for this business means death!"

Some morbid attraction, no less than the necessity for doing something with the body, urged him to see it. But, here again, the bitterness and the strangeness of his position came strongly upon him; for, though he stood in deadly peril of being charged with the murder of this girl, he was actually ignorant of the spot where her body lay. He shuddered at the thought that he might stumble upon it, at any step he took. Still casting about in his mind for the best method of finding the place, he went back to the Hall; and resolved to fortify himself with dinner, before doing anything.

"I suppose, if I really had murder on my soul, I should have no appetite—unless I were a hardened villain indeed. Being innocent, I'll make the best of things, until they come to the worst."

With this wise resolution, he dined well, and drank an excellent bottle of wine. The world beginning to look a little better, in direct consequence, he lit a cigar, and put the matter philosophically before himself.

"Men have been hung, I know, on slighter evidence than that which connects me with the dead girl. Yet, after all"—he derived very considerable satisfaction from the remembrance of this point—"I am not Dandy Chater—and never was. If I can only as readily persuade people that I am *not* my twin brother, as I have persuaded them that I *am*—I've nothing to fear. That's the point. However, I must know what the danger of discovery is, and exactly where I stand, before I do anything else. Then—if there is nothing for it but flight, the question will be: can I as readily drop my mask as I have assumed it? Frankly, I'm afraid I can't."

Knowing the impossibility of doing anything alone, by reason of his ignorance of the neighbourhood,

he rang the bell, and requested that Harry might be sent to him. In a few moments, the servant who had answered the summons returned, and, standing just within the door, announced that Harry was not to be found.

"What do you mean?" asked Philip. "Look about for him, man; he must be somewhere about the place."

"Begging your pardon, sir," replied the man—"e 'as been seen leavin' the grounds a little while since."

"Very well; it doesn't matter," said Philip, carelessly. "Send him to me when he returns."

The man withdrew, leaving Philip Chater in an uneasy frame of mind. He saw at once that, great as this lad's devotion might be to Dandy Chater, he had already, in a moment of passion, defied his master. He was scarcely more than a boy—and in that boy's hands hung the life of Philip Chater. That he should have gone out, in this fashion, without a word, was a circumstance suspicious enough at any time; that he should have done so now, was alarming in the extreme to the man who dreaded every moment to hear unaccustomed sounds in the house, which should denote that the secret of the wood was a secret no longer, and that men had come to take him.

"I can't stay here; I shall go mad, if I do," said Philip to himself. "After all, there may be only a few hours of liberty left to me—perhaps only a matter of minutes. Come—what shall I do with the time?"

A certain recklessness was upon the man—the recklessness which will make a man laugh sometimes, in the certain approach of death. With that feeling, too, came a softer one; in that hour of difficulty and danger, he turned, as it were instinctively, towards the woman who had kissed him—the woman who had whispered that she loved him. In his bitter loneliness, as has been said, his thoughts had turned to her, more often than was good for his peace of mind; and now a longing, greater than he could master, came upon him, to touch her hand—perhaps, by great good fortune, her lips—once again.

"Who knows—it may be for the last time!" he said. "There has not been so much of tenderness or beauty in my life, that I can afford to throw it churlishly aside, when it is given so freely to me. Madge, my sweet girl—this vagabond, thieving, murdering, masquerading lover of yours is coming to see you."

With that lighter, better mood upon him, he sought for the piece of paper, on which the plan had been drawn, and traced the paths by which he should reach the cottage; he found, as he had anticipated, that it was within some two or three hundred yards of his own lodge gates.

It was quite dark when he strolled out; but he had the plan very clearly in his mind, and he found his way, without difficulty, to the place he sought. It was a good-sized house, of but two stories, and rambling and old-fashioned; thrusting open a gate, set in the hedge which surrounded it, he walked across trim lawns, in the direction of certain long windows, which lighted a terrace, and behind which the warm glow of lamps and fires was shining.

But, before he reached this terrace, he heard an exclamation, and from out the shadow of some trees a figure came swiftly towards him. For a moment, he hesitated, and half drew back; but the figure came nearer, and he saw that it was Madge Barnshaw. In his great relief, and in his gladness, at that time, to see her friendly face, and her eyes giving him welcome, he took her silently in his arms, and kissed her.

"Dear Dandy," she said—and her voice was very low and soft—"how I have longed to see you!"

"Not more, dear heart, than I to see you," he replied. "But I—I have been—been very busy; so many things have occupied my attention—so many things have needed to—to be done. Why—what a poor lover you must think me!"

"Indeed—no," she said. "Only I feared—such a foolish thought, I know—I feared that something might be wrong with you—feared that you might be in danger. Dandy"—she was twisting a button on his coat round and round in her fingers, and her eyes were bent down, so that he could not see them—"you remember once a long talk we had, about—about your cousin—Mr. Ogledon—don't you?"

He did not, of course, remember it, for an obvious reason; but, as he was desirous of hearing as much as possible about that gentleman, he answered diplomatically,

"Well—what about him?"

"Dandy—dear old boy—I don't want you to think that I am uncharitable, or that this is a mere woman's whim. You remember that you were very angry with me, when last I spoke about him; you said——"

"I promise that you shall not make me angry this time—no matter what you say about him," broke in Philip, gently.

She raised her head quickly, and looked at him for a moment or two in silence. "Dandy," she said at last, looking at him strangely—"you have never been so good to me as you are to-night; never seemed so near to me. That old impatience of yours seems to be gone. Something has softened you; what is it?"

"Perhaps it is my love for you, dear Madge," he said; and indeed, he thought then that the love of her might have softened any man.

"Do you think so?" she asked, smiling at him happily. "And you will promise not to be angry at anything I say?"

"Most faithfully."

"Well, then, I mistrust that man. I think a woman sees deeper into the hearts of her fellow-creatures than a man can hope to do; perhaps it is God's gift to her, for her greater protection. The world is a sweet and precious place to me—especially since we have been drawn so much more strongly together—you and I; but I say from my heart that it would be a better place if that man were dead."

He looked at her in some astonishment; a rising tide of passion had flushed her face, and drawn her figure more erect. 101

"God forgive me for wishing harm to any living creature!" she went on, in the same low passionate voice—"but he is your worst foe, Dandy. Beneath his smiling, soft ways, he hides the heart of a devil; and I have seen that in his eyes, when you have not observed him, which has told me that he would not hesitate to do you a mischief, if you stood in the way of anything he desired."

Philip Chater suddenly remembered, even in the interest he took in what she said, that he had a part to play. Therefore, with a shrug of the shoulders, he replied, lightly—"Indeed—you do him a wrong, Madge. Besides, I can take care of myself, even if he should be as bad as you paint him."

Yet, how he longed, at that time, to tell her how true he believed her words to be! How he longed to fall at her feet, and tell her that the man to whom her heart had been given had been unworthy of it; that he was dead, and that another stood in his place—ready to take his place in a yet greater sense! But he knew that that was impossible; only, in his heart, was growing up a dreadful insane jealousy of the man who was dead.

"Where is he now?" she asked suddenly, after a little pause.

"I haven't the faintest idea," replied Philip, carelessly. "Come—surely we have something better to talk about than cousin Ogleton. See—the moon is rising—the moon that calls to lovers, all the world over, to worship him, and swear by him. What shall I swear to you, dear Madge?" 102

"Swear first of all," she said, still with that note of anxiety in her voice—"swear that you will have as little as possible to do with that man. Ah—do let me speak"—this as he was about to interrupt her—"I know, only too well, that I have reason for my anxiety. Come—if you love me, Dandy dear—promise me that you will have as little—"

"Indeed—I'll promise you that, with a light heart," exclaimed Philip. And indeed he had small desire to have anything at all to do with Mr. Ogleton.

"Thank you, dear boy—thank you!" exclaimed, gratefully. "That's quite like that newer, better self, which you promised I should see in you. There"—she bent forward, and kissed him lightly—"that in token that the matter is ended between us. Now—what shall we do? The moon is rising, as you say, and I don't want to go inside yet; Miss Vint plays propriety, and never understands when she is in the way."

"We certainly don't want Miss Vint," said Philip, with a laugh. "Come, my sweetheart—let us ramble here, for a little time, at least—and talk."

After pacing up and down the garden once or twice, they stopped, side by side, at a little gate which opened from the further corner of its somewhat limited extent; as the girl laid her hand upon it, Philip inwardly wondered where it led. She swung it open, quite as a matter of course, and as though that had been a favourite walk of her own and her lover; and they passed through, into a sort of little plantation. The moon was high, and the sky clear; their own shadows, and those of the trees, were sharp and distinct upon the ground. Still almost in silence, save for an occasional word, they passed on, side by side, until the gate was far behind them. 103

A thought had been growing in Philip Chater's mind while they walked; and he suddenly put it into words.

"You have some reason—other than the mere instinct of which you speak—for disliking Ogleton so much." He said it slowly, having been at some pains to work the thing out in his mind.

"I thought we had done with the matter, and were not to speak of it again?" she said.

"I think you ought to tell me; I think I ought to know," he said, doggedly. "In fact—haven't I the right to know?"

She was silent for some moments, while they still paced on steadily, side by side, leaving the gate in the garden further behind them at every step. So intent was he upon the girl, and so eagerly did he listen for her answer, that he did not observe that the plantation had changed to something of denser growth, and that the trees about them were thick and heavy, and the ground broken and uneven.

"Yes—I suppose you have the right," she said at last. "I always suspected the man, Dandy—I always disliked him. But a little time since, presuming upon a chance meeting with me, he protested—oh—you will not remember this afterwards—will you?—he protested his love for me, in a fashion so violent, that I have feared him ever since. He said that the stories about you and that girl—Patience Miller—"

Do what he would, he could not repress a start—could not keep his face wholly within control. So violent had the start been, that she had stopped instinctively, and had dropped her hand from his arm. 104

"Why—what is the matter? Dandy dear—you are ill!"

"Nothing—nothing is the matter," he replied, with a faint smile. "My God—what's that?"

In the silence of the place, as the man and the woman stood looking into each other's eyes, there had come, borne upon the still air, the unmistakable thud—thud of a spade in stiff earth. A question forced itself to the man's lips, and found voice, quite as though some other voice had spoken.

"Madge—in Heaven's name—what place is this?"

She stared at him, in mingled amazement and terror; while he, for his part, seemed to count the steady thud—thud near to them, as he might have counted his own heart beats, if life were ebbing from him.

"What place? Dandy—you are dreaming! Surely you know that this is the wood—the wood behind the mill—you know——"

With a cry like that of a wounded animal, Philip Chater sprang from her, and went plunging among the trees, in the direction of that frightful sound. He came, in a moment, upon something which brought him to his knees, with a suppressed scream; the body of a young girl, about whom all the earth seemed stained a dreadful crimson. Beyond that sight, was the young lad Harry, up to his knees in a long shallow trench, in which he was digging away like a fury. He neither heard his master's approach, nor glanced up for a moment.

Philip turned, and crashed back through the wood, until he reached the woman's side again. "Come away," he whispered, hurriedly—"it—it is nothing; come away—for God's sake!"

But she broke from him, and went racing in the direction he had himself taken, and was lost to sight in a moment. He heard, through the silence that brooded awfully upon the place, a piercing scream; and the next moment she came plunging headlong past him, and went, staggering blindly, with her hands before her eyes, in the direction in which they had walked so calmly but a few moments before.

A SUMMONS FROM SHYLOCK

For quite a long time, Philip Chater stood, staring helplessly in the direction in which the girl had disappeared. All around him was the silence of the wood, broken only by the call of some night-bird, or by the whisper and rustle of the branches, stirred by a rising wind. So still was it all, that he almost shrieked aloud when a hand was laid softly on his arm.

It was Harry—white-faced, and shaking as though with an ague. He, too, gazed in the direction in which Philip's eyes were turned, and spoke in a frightened whisper.

"Master Dandy—did she—did she see it?"

The question roused Philip, and put the whole horrible thing more clearly before him than it had appeared even in his imagination. He looked round at the lad, and spoke aloud, and in a tone of recklessness quite out of keeping with the peril of his situation. But all considerations of prudence had been swept aside, at that time; ringing in his ears still, was the startled scream of the woman he loved—(yes—he could confess it to his own heart, now that he had lost her)—before his eyes again was the sight of her running figure, with its horror-struck eyes hidden from his view.

"See it! Of course she saw it. What does it matter? All the world may see it; all the world may know of it. Take your spade away, Harry; you may dig a grave, as deep as the pit of Hell itself, and yet you shall not hide that thing! Why do you tremble? What is there for *you* to tremble at? Her blood cries out—not against you, but against me; it cries to Heaven—'See—Dandy Chater killed me—Dandy Chater spilled my blood on God's fair earth—Dandy Chater——'"

107

His voice had risen to a cry; the other sprang at him, and clapped a shaking hand over his mouth.

"Stop—stop, for God's sake!" he cried, huskily. "Are you mad, Master Dandy—are you mad? I tell you it can be hidden; no man knows of it but myself, and Miss Barnshaw will say nothing."

"I tell you it shall not be hidden," cried Philip, impatiently. "Why—if any one found you here, digging a grave for it—don't you understand that suspicion would fall upon you?"

"I don't care about that, Master Dandy," he cried. "Better me than you. Let them think what they will, Master Dandy; only get you gone, before the hue and cry is raised."

"No—I shall not go," replied Philip, speaking quite calmly, and with a certain hopeless note in his voice which was more impressive than any other utterance could have been. "My dear boy—you can't understand that it doesn't matter one little bit—now. It has been a blunder and a muddle, from first to last; Fate has proved too strong for me—I'll struggle against it no longer."

"But, Master Dandy," urged the eager voice—"won't you let me hide it—at least, for the moment? It will give you time to get away—time to hide."

108

"I tell you I shall not hide," said Philip, quietly. "Come away; I won't have you mixed up in the business. Why—dear lad"—he dropped his hand, for a moment, on the other's shoulder—"there's a sweet girl, whom you love, and who loves you, I'll be bound, no matter what she may say. Your life is straight before you; you mustn't throw it away on me."

He turned, and went in the direction he had come, looking behind him once, to be certain that the other was following. Suddenly remembering that he was like a blind man, groping his way, and having no desire to go near Madge Barnshaw's house again, he turned abruptly, when he had gone a little way, and motioned to Harry to go before him.

"Lead the way," he said, in the old tone of authority—"I want to be sure that you don't go back again."

Harry passed him, with bent head, and walked in front. And in that order they came to Chater Hall.

Once inside the home which he felt was rightly his, and surrounded by the quiet and luxurious repose of it, the mood of the man changed. He was but young, and life was very, very sweet. Quixotism, self-sacrifice, despair; all these things went to the winds. He was a hunted man, playing a desperate game with chance, with his life for the stake. Figuratively speaking, he had his back to the wall; and he meant to make a fight for it, before he gave in.

109

Pretence was gone; and he was more lonely even than before. The one being who had seemed to turn to him naturally, avoided him now with horror, as one whose hands were stained with blood. Whatever hope might have been in his mind of escaping was gone; he no longer masqueraded in another man's garments, and in another man's place; he was battling for his life.

"Every moment that I stay here makes the danger greater; that thing may be found, and they may be upon me, like bloodhounds, at any moment. I must clear myself; I must, if necessary, undo all that I have done, and declare who I really am. But, if I stop here, I shall be caught like a rat in a trap. I want time to think—time to plan out what I must do——What's that?"

Some one had knocked softly at the door. After a moment's pause, Philip Chater, in a nervous voice, called out—"Come in!"

A servant entered, bearing a letter. "I did not know you were in, sir," he said. "This came while you were out."

Philip Chater—doubly suspicious now—looked at the man curiously as he took the letter. Was it possible that some one had watched his going out—had even seen Harry going in the direction of

the wood first, carrying the spade for his awful work? The spade! It had been left behind, in that half-dug grave; there had been no time even to think of it. All these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, in the few seconds during which the man handed him the letter—bowed respectfully—and retired.

Almost mechanically, he tore open the envelope, and unfolded the sheet within it.

“DEAR SIR,

“It is imperative that you should see me at once. I use the term ‘imperative,’ because it is necessary that there should be no delay about the matter. Permit me to add that the business has reference to the draft, recently paid into my hands, and drawn by a Mr. Arthur Barnshaw. I must ask you, if quite convenient to yourself, to be good enough to call upon me, at my office, to-morrow (Thursday) before noon.

“I am, Dear Sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“Z. ISAACSON.”

The letter bore an address in the neighbourhood of Old Broad Street, London—and was dated that day.

Philip Chater read the letter through three times, without coming any nearer to its meaning. Again, the phrase—“drawn by a Mr. Arthur Barnshaw”—was more puzzling than anything else. It was, of course, probable—indeed, almost certain—that this Mr. Arthur Barnshaw was a relative of Madge; but, if so, what relative?—and on what terms of friendship, or otherwise, had he stood with the late Dandy Chater? All these things had to be discovered.

“Under any circumstances,” said Philip to himself, “this letter helps me, and points the road that I must travel. For the time, at least, I must get out of the way; this business calls me to London—and to London I will go. The name of Isaacson has a flavour of sixty per cent. and promissory notes; but I must leave explanations to him. I wish I knew who Arthur Barnshaw is.”

111

Still with that dread upon him of the fearful thing in the wood, he determined not to wait until the morrow, but to start for London that night. Finding, however, that it was far too late for any train to be running, he made up his mind to press Harry into his service; and sent for him, without any further delay.

The lad made his appearance at once, and stood quietly just within the closed door of the room, waiting for his master to speak. Between the two, from this night onwards, there seemed a tacit understanding that something was not to be mentioned between them, at any time—even while there was an equally strong understanding—also unspoken—that each watched for danger, and was ready to act swiftly, if necessary.

“Harry—I am going to London. Yes—yes—I know”—as the other glanced instinctively at the clock—“it’s too late for trains; I must drive as far as possible—and walk the rest. I leave all the details to you; get the horse you think will stay best; we shall go some fifteen miles, and you can then drop me, and drive back. Quick—there is no time to be lost!”

Understanding, only too well, the necessity for quickness and for caution, Harry returned, in a very short space of time, to announce that the dog-cart was in waiting at the gate in the lane, and a bag, packed with a few necessary articles, already in it. With the servant leading the way, Philip went through a long passage he had never traversed before, and, passing through a low doorway, found himself under the stars. The two men went silently across a sort of paddock, and came out into a narrow lane, where the dog-cart stood waiting, with the horse fastened to the fence.

112

“I thought it best to do it myself, Master Dandy; so I sent Jim away, and did the harnessing alone,” he said.

“Quite right, Harry,” replied Philip. “Here—you’d better drive—and take the straight road for London, once we get past the village.”

They had come almost to the end of the lane, when Philip’s quick ear detected the sound of running feet, on the road towards which they were driving. He signed to Harry to check the horse scarcely twenty yards from the road; and they drew up in the shadow of the trees.

“Get down,” he whispered to the lad—“and stroll out into the road to meet them. Find out what is the matter.”

Harry jumped down, and reached the road just as two men came running heavily along it. Philip, listening intently, while they gave their breathless answers, knew that the body was found, and that the frightened yokels were off in search of the village constable. As their hurried footsteps died away in the distance, Harry came back to the trap, and climbed in, and took the reins.

113

“You were wise to start to-night, Master Dandy,” he said, as he started the horse. “Bamberton won’t sleep to-night, with this news in the air.”

Leaving Bamberton behind them—to be stirred to its depths presently by the news, and to gather itself in excited shuddering knots, within and without the Chater Arms, and other public places; and to whisper, and shake heads, and offer many wise suggestions in regard to the murder—Philip Chater and his companion headed straight for London. It was pitch dark, and heavy rain had begun to fall, when, within about ten or fifteen miles of the first straggling outskirts of the great city, Philip directed the vehicle to be stopped, and sprang down into the road. They had rattled on, mile after mile, in silence; now, as he stood beside the steaming horse, he looked up at his servant.

"Understand, Harry," he said, "I won't have you interfere in this matter again. Keep away from the wood—keep away from everything and everybody. I am more grateful than I can say, for your devotion; and I will not insult you by asking you to be silent. Keep a stout heart, my lad; I'll get clear of this, and be back with you before very long. Good-bye!"

He turned away, and struck off alone in the direction of London; Harry turned the jaded horse, and started on his journey back to Bamberton.

It was a very drenched and disconsolate-looking man that tramped into the slowly awakening streets of London some hours later. He found a modest hotel—a sort of superior public-house, of an old-fashioned type; and, after waiting some considerable time, was able to get something of a meal, and to get to bed. But his last thought, as he undressed, was that this hurried flight, on the spur of the moment, had been a blunder.

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"Harry's devotion and my fright have, I fear, carried us both away," he muttered to himself. "The smuggling out of the dog-cart by a back way; this hurried race to London; above all—the spade, taken, I suspect, from the Hall—and left so near the body; it all points to Dandy Chater. Well—I must get this interview over to-morrow—or rather to-day—and see what further troubles are in store for me. For the moment, I am worn out, and shall do no good by thinking or planning."

He slept soundly, and—a little before noon—presented himself at the office of Mr. Z. Isaacson, in the neighbourhood of Old Broad Street.

It was a somewhat pretentious place, consisting, so far as he could see, of but two rooms; the first of which, at least, was very solidly and heavily furnished. But by far the most solid and heavy piece of furniture in the place was the gentleman he imagined to be Mr. Z. Isaacson—a portly individual, with pronounced features, much watch-chain, and some heavy rings on his fat white fingers. Remembering, in time, that he was probably supposed to know this gentleman with some intimacy, Philip nodded carelessly, and threw himself into the chair which the other indicated.

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"I'm glad you've come, my dear boy," began Mr. Isaacson, in a familiar manner. He spoke with something of a nasal accent, and a little as though his tongue were too large for his mouth. "You know—we like to have things pleasant and square, and I like—as you've found before to-day—to do the amiable, if I can. But, you know, dear boy"—he passed his large hand over his shining bald head, and shook that head gravely—"this is rather—well, you know—really—"

His voice trailed off, and he pretended to be busy with some papers on his desk. Philip Chater looked at him for a moment, and then broke out impatiently,

"What are you talking about? What do you want with me?"

"Now, my dear boy," said Mr. Isaacson, soothingly—"this is not the spirit I like to see—it isn't really. You and me have had dealings, this year or two, and you've paid the little bit of interest I've asked, fairly and squarely; likewise, I've renewed from time to time—for a little consideration—and all has been square and pleasant. But, when it comes to playing it off on an old friend in this fashion—well, really, you know—"

Philip Chater was in no mood for unprofitable conversation, especially with a man of this stamp, on that particular morning. His nerves had been tried, beyond the lot of common nerves, within the past four-and-twenty hours; he had had a wet and weary journey, and not too much sleep. Consequently, the smooth oily utterances of Mr. Isaacson drove him almost to frenzy.

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"Why the devil can't you say what you're driving at, and be done with it. You've brought me all this distance," he cried, savagely—"and now you're mouthing and carrying on in this fashion. What's the matter with you? Out with it!"

Mr. Isaacson's face underwent a sudden change; certain veins in his temples swelled up ominously, and he came a little way round his desk; leaning over it, and putting his face near to that of his visitor, he said, truculently—

"Oh—so you want me to out with it—do you? You're not a bit ashamed of what you've done—"

"Ashamed? What of?" cried Philip.

"Forgery! Obtaining money by false pretences! Robbery! Holy Israel!—how much more do you want?"

"Not much more—thank you," replied Philip, staggered into calmness. "Perhaps you'll have the goodness to explain."

"There isn't much explanation needed," snarled the other. "The last time you were in this office, you paid me a cheque for one thousand six hundred and twenty-six pounds, for accumulated interest, expenses, and other matters; because I had threatened that, unless I had that sum, by that date, I would come down on you, and sell you up. Now, you knew, Mr. Dandy Chater—and I knew—that you hadn't any such sum of your own; therefore you came to me, bringing a cheque for the amount, on the same bank as your own, at Chelmsford, from a Mr. Arthur Barnshaw—the brother, so you told me, of the young lady you expected to marry."

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("I'm glad I know who Arthur Barnshaw is," thought Philip.)

"You told me a pretty story, about his having lent you the money, out of affection for his dear sister, and to keep the knowledge of your affairs from her ears. Now, Mr. Dandy Chater"—the man brought his hand down upon the desk with a bang, and became rather more red than before in the face—"perhaps you'll be surprised to learn that that cheque has been referred, on account of the signature, to Mr. Barnshaw himself; and that he unhesitatingly states that it is a forgery, and that he never drew any cheque, for any such amount."

Philip Chater, utterly at a loss what to say, sat staring at the man helplessly. The opening of the door behind him, and a change of expression to something milder on the part of Mr. Isaacson's countenance, caused him to turn his head.

A young man—at whom it was unnecessary to cast a second glance, to assure him that this was Madge's brother—had entered the room; had stopped, on seeing Philip; and now came hesitatingly forward. He was younger than Philip—scarcely more, from his appearance, than a year or two the senior of his sister. He waved aside the man Isaacson, and said, in a low voice, to Philip—

"I say, old fellow—I'd like to have a word with you." Then, as Philip rose, and walked with him towards a window, he added, in a low voice—"Look here, Dandy—I want to do the square thing; and I swear to you that, if I'd have known that this affair had anything to do with you, I should never have pressed my enquiries. But, you see, the cheque was made out to the order of that old shark at the desk there, and I never guessed—now, look here—you've got into a hole, old boy—but I'd like to pull you out of it, if I can. What can we do? You see, I've got to think, not only of you, but of Madge; it'll be such an awful blow to her."

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Philip wondered whether anything could be a greater blow to her than the sight on which her eyes had rested in the wood. But he said nothing. His one desire, at the moment, was to get clear away; and to drop, as completely as possible, out of the life in which he had usurped a place. There was, too, a wholly foolish and ridiculous idea in his head, that he would not like this girl, who had kissed his lips, and had once believed in him—(or in his dead counterpart)—to have any worse opinion than she at that time cherished. As by an inspiration, he remembered that the notes he had received on the night of the meeting at "The Three Watermen" were still in his pocket. He determined to use them.

He explained briefly to Arthur—even while he expressed his regret—that he had unexpectedly received a considerable sum of money—the proceeds from some speculations, the shares in which had long lain useless. He suggested that it might be possible to bribe that worthy Hebrew at the desk.

Mr. Isaacson was not at first to be persuaded; but the cheque being in his hands—marked "Refer to drawer"—he at last agreed to sell it, for the sum of three thousand pounds. Arthur Barnshaw struck a match—set fire to the tell-tale paper—and allowed it to burn down to his fingers. "That matter is done with," he said, quietly.

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In the street, however, a change came over him; he stood, for a moment, looking at Philip, and then thrust his hands into his pockets. "I don't think I should care to shake hands—not yet," he said. "I want to get over this." He turned, and walked away.

At the same moment, a newsboy—hurrying past—shouted at the full pitch of his lungs—"Orrible murder in Essex! Bank robbery in Sheffield! Weener!"

Philip Chater staggered, and then walked on, in a dazed condition. For he knew that he stood—wholly, in the one case—partly, in the other—responsible for both.

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A BODY FROM THE RIVER

Captain Peter Quist, for some two or three days after his parting with Philip Chater, roamed about uneasily, in his search for a desirable circus which might happen to be for disposal, and which might possess the additional advantage of having attached to it a fat lady or two, who might not object to show herself, for a consideration, to a curious public. On more than one occasion, he entered into negotiations with gentlemen—usually hoarse as to voice, and inflamed as to countenance—who appeared, at first, to possess the very thing he wanted; whereupon, “toothfuls” were exchanged, and much conversation ensued.

But the guileless captain always discovered, when it came to actual business, that the “circus” consisted of a caravan or two, in a state of advanced dilapidation, up a yard; that the horses (if there had ever been any) were long since dead, or engaged in agricultural pursuits; that the clowns had long since left off being funny, and taken, for the most part, to itinerant preaching; that the fat ladies had retired from business—married the man who took the money at the doors—and started public-houses.

Some three or four days of such hopeless interviewing having reduced the Captain to a state of despondency, he cast about in his mind for something which should restore him to his usual condition of placid cheerfulness; and, having imbibed somewhat freely of his favourite beverage, and being then on the outskirts of those narrow and straggling little streets beyond the actual town of Woolwich, discovered that the river drew him, like a magnet—probably from the fact of his legs being somewhat unsteady, and causing him, for that reason, to imagine that they were sea-going, like his mind.

Wandering down some slippery stone steps, leading to a causeway of cobble-stones, and doing so at the imminent risk of his life, owing to his condition, the Captain precipitated himself on to the shoulders of a little man, who was seated on the top of a wooden post, with his chin propped in his hands, and who was gazing in a melancholy fashion at the water. The Captain, having saved both himself and the little man, by clasping him affectionately round the neck, broke into profuse apologies. And, indeed, they were necessary; for the little man—who was very shabby, and had no linen that was visible, but whose whiskers had a bedraggled air of having once been fashionable—was almost speechless with rage and fright; and danced about on the causeway, shaking his fist, and threatening—in a thin piping voice, and with many oaths—his vengeance upon the Captain.

“‘Ere—’old ‘ard, guv’nor—’old ‘ard,” exclaimed the Captain. “This comes of gettin’ into bad company; I’m surprised at a man of your hage, usin’ all them naughty words; w’erever did yer learn ‘em, mess-mate? It wasn’t my fault, Mister; the steps was a slide—an’ these ‘ere stones is all bumps; an’ w’en a man comes from a slide to bumps—sudden-like—I puts it to you that ‘e ain’t responsible for ‘isself. An’ I ‘umbly asks yer pardon.”

The little man, appearing somewhat appeased, sat down on his post again, and meditatively pulled at his whiskers—glancing round now and then at the Captain, as though apprehensive of his indulging in some other gymnastic performance. The Captain, for his part, being of a peaceful nature, began to make, overtures of friendliness—the more so that he had a dim notion in his brain that he had seen the little man on a previous occasion.

However, as the little man remained obstinately silent, despite all the Captain’s conversational overtures, that gentleman turned his attention to the boats, several of which were moored near at hand, with a man sitting near by, smoking, and keeping an eye upon them. This man, as a familiar spirit, the Captain accosted.

“Nice boats you’ve got ‘ere,” said the Captain, casually.

“Ah”—responded the man, looking the Captain up and down—“the boats is all right.” By which he seemed to imply that somebody else was not.

“I suppose a man might ‘ire a boat—eh?” was the Captain’s next enquiry.

“Do you fink they’re on this ‘ere river for the kids to look at—or to pervide me with amoosement in bailin’ of ‘em out?” asked the man, indignantly.

The Captain, meekly repudiating the idea that any such thought was in his mind, carried his enquiry a little further, by asking if he might “‘ire one for a hour or so.”

“Can yer row?” asked the man, after a pause.

“Can I what?” shouted the Captain.

The man coolly repeated his question, and went on placidly smoking. The Captain, when he had recovered his breath, spoke with an unnatural calmness.

“P’raps, my man, you takes me for a omnibus conductor,” he said. “Bring round one of them boats, an’ steady ‘er w’ile I gits in—will yer?”

The man, seeing that the Captain really meant business, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, got into one of the boats, and slowly pushed it from where it was moored until it bumped against the causeway. The Captain, in his delight at the prospect of being once more afloat, suddenly remembered the little man with the faded whiskers, who had sat all this time, absolutely unmoved, on his post.

"Ere—mess-mate—let bygorns be bygorns—an' come an' 'ave a blow." He clutched the little man by the arm, in a jocular fashion, and made as if to pull him towards the boat.

It unfortunately happened, however, that the little man was nearly asleep; being pulled from his seat with such violence, and so unexpectedly, he had only a dim idea of what was happening, and of where he was. Realising, however, that he was in the grip of a stronger man, he suddenly flung himself fiercely upon the Captain, driving that gentleman backwards towards the boat. The Captain, for his part, in an endeavour to protect himself, made a rough-and-tumble of it, and twisted the little man clean off his legs. Moreover, he twisted him too far; and, being very unsteady on his legs himself, fairly rolled with him off the causeway into the boat.

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The man in charge of the boat—being, probably, very glad to get rid of them; and feeling, perhaps, that they had better be left to settle whatever differences they might have in their own fashion, immediately shoved the boat off; so that, by the time the Captain got his head out of the bottom of the boat, and sat up to look at his passenger, they were well out into the stream.

"This comes of keepin' bad company," murmured the Captain, ruefully rubbing the back of his head. "However, I asked you to come fer a blow—and you've come accordin'; but you needn't 'ave bin in sich a 'urry, an' come with sich a rush."

With these words, the Captain took the oars, and dexterously pulled into the stream, out of the way of a lumbering barge—exchanging a little light and airy badinage with the man in charge of that craft as it passed him. The little man, who had been so unceremoniously taken for an airing, appeared to take the matter in good part; picked up his dilapidated silk hat from the bottom of the boat—put it on—and sat, grimly silent, watching the Captain.

"It's a nice arternoon fer a row," said the Captain pleasantly, as he pulled sturdily. "Ain't yer glad you come alonger me, mess-mate?"

The little man murmured something uncomplimentary, and then was silent. The Captain, who began to feel the sobering effects of the breeze and the exercise, smiled upon him benignly, and pulled harder. After a long pause, the little man, who had been staring at him intently, nodded his head three or four times, and spoke again.

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"I thought I'd seen you before," he said, in his thin piping voice. "Now I'm sure of it. It was on Tuesday—and you were with that infernal Chater."

The Captain almost dropped his oars in his astonishment. "Why—so it was!" he exclaimed. "You was a sittin' at the table; I'd seed yer just afore the light went out."

The little man, for some unknown reason, began to tremble; looked all about him, indeed, as though contemplating making a sudden exit from the boat. "What do you want with me?" he asked, in a whining voice.

"I don't want nothink with yer," replied the Captain, staring at him. "Thought you might like a turn on the river, in a friendly way—that's all."

"Don't tell lies!" ejaculated the other. "I can tell you this: you won't get any good out of me. I'm only a poor old man, who's been unfortunate, and has fallen on evil days. If you think you'll make anything out of me, you're much mistaken. What do you want with me?"

The Captain looked at him in amazement; the little man's terror appeared so strong. "W'y—wot do you take me for?" he asked.

"Oh—I know what you are," cried the little man, wagging his head. "You're a split—a detective—a policeman. I know what you are."

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The Captain stood up in the boat, and put himself in a fighting attitude. "Say that again—and I'll knock you out of the boat!" he shouted. "I'd 'ave yer know that I'm a decent sailor-man—an' a captain at that. 'Oo are you a callin' a policeman?"

"The Shady 'un said so," replied the little man, tremulously.

"That Shady gent said a good many things as 'e'll 'ave to answer for," said the Captain, sitting down again. "W'y, if I'd wanted to run yer in, I reckon I could 'ave picked yer up under my arm, an' done it easy, without 'irin' a boat for it—'Ullo—wot's that?"

The boat, travelling slowly, had struck something—struck it softly, but sufficiently to send a slight quiver through its timbers. The Captain, backing water at once, peered over the side; dipped an oar deep, and swung the boat's head round with a sturdy pull; leaned over, and caught at something bobbing near the surface of the water. His carelessness had gone in a moment; he was the quick, masterful man, used to a boat, and used to matters of life and death.

"Sit tight there," he commanded. "'Ere—ketch this oar; that's it—keep her steady. There's a body 'ere!"

The mention of that seemed to stir something in the little man; he became all attention, in a moment, and watched the other's movements with alert eyes.

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"Can't get 'im into the boat," said the Captain, in a low voice. "'E's dead—bin dead days, I should think. Throw me that line there."

The little man obeying promptly, the Captain, leaning over the edge of the boat, made the line fast to that grim thing bobbing alongside; and then turned the boat's head for the shore, and pulled hard. The little man in the stern was so interested in that grisly passenger, that he must needs go to the very end of the boat, at the imminent risk of losing his silk hat—and peer at the thing as it came along behind, making a wake in the water as it swept through it.

They happened, by this time, to be quite clear of the town, and to have come to a spot where the bank was low and flat, and where it was easy to run the boat ashore. This the Captain did, and together they leapt out—hailed the boat up—and afterwards hauled in the body.

As it came in on the line, hand over hand—seeming, in their imagination, to assist the operation horribly, by crawling up over the dank mud, the Captain and the little man bent forward together, to look at it; and started back, as one man, at the sight of the swollen, distorted features. For it was the body of Dandy Chater.

Dandy Chater—born to such good and prosperous things—having his beginnings in such fair and unclouded circumstances—to have come to this at last! Well for him, surely, that the mother, at whose knee he had lisped his childish supplications to Heaven, was dead, before this thing fronted the world, and grinned back at it so horribly! To be found like this—muddy—soiled—broken—awful—dead—by two strangers, far away from the fair and pleasant places through which he had wandered in his innocent boyhood!

The Captain—raising his head from the contemplation of what he believed to be the features of his dead friend Philip Crowdy—was confronted by the startled eyes of the little man with the faded whiskers. For a long minute, they stared at each other in silence; the thoughts of each were busy—for each had something to hide.

For his part, Captain Peter Quist—whatever his personal grief may have been—bore in remembrance certain words impressed strongly upon him by the supposed Philip Crowdy; an injunction laid upon him not to reveal who he was, or that he was living under another name. The Captain—good honest fellow that he was—had a very sincere regard for his friend; and, believing that he had, in a moment of indiscretion, got mixed up with some queer people, was glad to feel that he could bury the knowledge of it in his own breast, as surely as the dead man would be buried in his grave. Sorrowing for him as he did, and bitterly vengeful as he felt, in his heart, at the mere suspicion that there had been foul play, he yet had the philosophic feeling that it did not matter now, as the man was dead; and the gentle thought that it would be a vile thing to defame one no longer able to defend himself.

The little man—who was, of course, no other than the Dr. Cripps of “The Three Watermen”—had equally strong reasons for preserving silence. With that scene in the upper room of the little public-house still clearly before his mental vision, he saw, in this tragedy, the vengeance of some member or members of the gang—a vengeance prompted by fear that Dandy Chater had betrayed them. Being himself remarkably closely connected with that gang, he saw his own head in peril, if any stir were raised about this business. Therefore, it will be seen that the two men had equally strong reasons for saying nothing about the identity of the man who lay dead between them.

The Captain, however, being, in his sober moments, a cautious man, looked attentively at the other, and said slowly—“Bad business—this ‘ere. Do you ‘appen to know the gent?”

“No—never saw him in my life. How the devil should I?” stammered Cripps, with his teeth chattering.

“Nor me,” said the Captain. After a long pause, he asked—“Wot are we agoin’ to do with ‘im?”

The question was answered for them, in an abrupt and startling manner; for another face—that of a very dirty, keen-eyed, ragged-headed urchin, whose bare feet had brought him silently over the muddy bank—was obtruded between them, and stared down into the face of the dead man. Before either of them had time to say a word, the urchin leapt to his feet again, with a cry, and scudded away in the direction of the nearest houses.

“That’s done it,” murmured the Captain, in a resigned voice; “we’ll ‘ave a policeman ‘ere, in no time.” Then, a sudden thought striking him, he looked at the little man, and asked slowly—“Wot’s your opinion of ‘ookin’ it, mess-mate?”

Dr. Cripps appearing to be too dazed fully to comprehend the situation, the Captain took him by the shoulders—gave him a shake or two—and stated the case.

“We can’t do no good by stoppin’ ‘ere,” he said. “We shall only be ‘awled up at the hinqest, an’ asked awkward questions. Nobody ain’t seen us—‘cept that young limb—an’ I doubt if ‘e knows us again. Therefore—wot I ses is—into the boat with yer—an’ let’s cut our lucky!”

Cripps appearing to grasp this point, after some difficulty, they left the dead man on the shore, and pushed off the boat, and made for Woolwich. Going, without further mishap, up the stream, they landed at the causeway from which they had so unceremoniously started—apparently greatly to the surprise and satisfaction of the man to whom the boat belonged.

“Got back, yer see,” said the Captain, carelessly, as he stepped on to the causeway, and gave a hand to the little man.

“So I see,” replied the man, pocketing the money which the Captain handed to him. “Ad a nice row?”

“Oh—so-so,” responded the Captain. “I should like to give you an ‘int, young man,” he added. “W’en you’re a shovin’ orf a boat nex’ time, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to give a man a chance of settin’ down fust. It ain’t wot you’d call a ‘ealthy style of rowin’, w’en you starts on the back of yer neck; it don’t some’ow give yer as good a chance, as if yer started sittin’ down, with a proper ‘old on the oars. *Good-arternoon!*”

But, although the Captain was jocular, his heart was heavy; remembering the hiding and dodging process through which he had passed, in the company of the supposed Philip Crowdy, he began to

see some dreadful tragedy—some foul play, which had caused the death of his friend. Yet, being but a simple seafaring man, and having a great dread of the power of the law, he saw himself in unheard-of difficulties, if he so much as attempted to stir in the matter. For had he not found the body—and then fled from it?

“From the look of that there body,” muttered the Captain to himself, as he strolled along, in the gathering twilight of the streets—“it’s bin in the water a day or two—in fact, it might ‘ave bin longer, if I didn’t know as ‘ow I’d seen poor old Phil on’y three days back. An’ to think as ‘e was that strong an’ ‘earty—an’ now!”

The Captain did not finish his sentence; he shuddered, at the remembrance of that awful staring thing he had left on the muddy bank of the Thames; and—feeling somewhat faint—looked about for a house of refreshment.

When he emerged, after imbibing several glasses of his favourite tonic, the world wore a brighter aspect; and the honest Captain, swaggering along the pavement, with an occasional lurch, as though a heavy gale of wind had struck him—had clean forgotten all about unpleasant bodies, or the chances and changes of this mortal life; had clean forgotten, in fact, anything but that the world was a good place, and decent rum a thing to be thankful for.

Now it happened, by some unlucky chance, that Philip Chater—drawn, by strong influence, to the scene of the tragedy which had been so vividly stamped upon his mind—came, that night, to Woolwich; merely wandering aimlessly, with no settled plan as to the future, or, indeed, as to the next hour. And it happened, too, that, walking slowly along a dark street, and coming to the corner of it, he cannoned against a man, who was rolling along swiftly, chanting a song in a very loud and very deep voice.

It was the Captain; and that gentleman no sooner caught sight of Philip, than his song stopped, in the very middle of a note; indeed, the note turned to a shriek, and Peter Quist, beating off the supposed apparition with both hands, backed away from it unsteadily; and then, recovering power of definite motion, fairly turned tail, and ran as if for his life—leaving Philip alone, at the corner of the street, staring after him in blank amazement.

MISS VINT HEARS VOICES

Philip stood, for some moments, turning over in his mind the probable cause of the extraordinary terror evinced by the Captain, while he watched the flying figure of that gentleman, careering down the street. After some little thought, he put down that sudden desire, on the Captain's part, to get away from him, to a knowledge of the murder; and to a natural dread and abhorrence of the man he supposed to be guilty of it. He turned away, with bitterness in his heart, feeling that all the world was against him; and made his way back towards London by train. Arriving at Charing Cross, he bought an evening paper, and turned to see what news there might be concerning the dreadful thing which was always in his mind.

More than a column was devoted to it—with interviews with wholly uninteresting people, of whom he had never heard, nor, indeed, any one else—giving their several versions of the matter; how this one had heard a scream—and another a dog bark—and how a third had an aunt, who had dreamed of a man with a red mark on his forehead, about a week before the occurrence. But there was absolutely nothing in any report which connected him with the affair—at least, by name.

It was stated that the police had several clues; but that was to be expected. Only, at the end of the column, was a suggestion that the police had issued a warrant against a man well known in the neighbourhood, who had disappeared some two days before. That was from a telegram dated that afternoon—Friday. 134

Philip Chater sat down, on a seat in the station, and pondered the matter again. "The warrant is for me—that's certain. But there is no mention of my name—so that that idea about the Captain goes to the winds. Now—what on earth can have startled him in that fashion?"

Turning the paper over in his hands, he came upon a "Stop-Press" telegram, in the small space reserved for such things, and read it.

"The body of an unknown man—well dressed—was taken from the river below Woolwich this afternoon. Nothing in pockets to lead to identification."

Once again, Philip Chater seemed to stand at the corner of the dark street in Woolwich; once again, he seemed to see the ghastly face of the startled Captain, as he backed away. Philip Chater folded the paper rapidly, and got up, with an excited face.

"By all that's wonderful!—he's found the real Dandy Chater!" he muttered.

That thought, and all that it might involve for him and so many others, set him walking at a rapid pace, thinking hard as he went, and without paying much attention as to the direction he took. But his thoughts, coming, by a natural transition, to the girl who would be most affected by any news of Dandy Chater, leapt from thence to the quiet garden, wherein he had walked and talked with her. Then in a flash, his mind went back, over the discovery of the road which led him to the cottage, to the plan on the scrap of paper—and to the reason for that plan. 135

"Friday night—as soon after ten o'clock as possible. Only women to deal with! Great Heavens!" he exclaimed—"and this is Friday night!"

He hailed a hansom, and shouted to the man to drive to Liverpool Street Station. Arriving there in hot haste, he found that he could catch an express, which would land him at a small town a few miles from the station at which he had before alighted for Bamberton. Taking his seat in this, a few moments before its departure, he found himself, somewhat to his consternation, in the company of a couple of men who were discussing the murder in the wood—evidently newspaper men, judging by what they said.

"Yes," said the first—"I'm going down, so as to be on the spot if there's anything fresh. In any case, I must wire up about half a column."

"I think we shall probably have some news to-night," replied the second man. "Our people have got hold of an idea that the police have spotted their man, and may get hold of him within the next few hours. I hear that Tokely has the case in hand."

"Ah—smart man, Tokely," said the other nodding. "I wonder if that swell who was spoken about had anything to do with it?" 136

"I dare say," replied his friend, coolly. "If so, it'll make rare good copy—won't it? Trusting village maiden—young Squire—and all the other details. By Jove—won't our people lick it up!"

Philip Chater, sick at heart, turned away, and tried to busy himself in the paper he had bought. But the more he tried to read, and to fix his mind on the page before him, the more hopeless became the tangle into which the words seemed to form themselves. He thought of himself—a fugitive; of his brother, fished out of the river, and perhaps by this time identified. Philip Chater had but to think, for an instant, of the contents of his own pockets at that moment, to realise the desperate position in which he stood.

He had the dead man's watch and chain—his cheque book and other papers; he had upon him also, a large number of bank-notes, which he knew must have been stolen, and part of which he had paid away to cover up a forgery which he was also supposed to have committed. More than all, he was venturing now into the very heart of the enemy's country, in the hope to stop a robbery, with which he was also connected—and at the house of the woman he loved. It is small wonder that he saw, in all this, a resistless tide, which must sooner or later sweep him to destruction.

Arriving at the small station for which he had taken his ticket, he alighted with the two newspaper men, and saw them get into a vehicle which had evidently been ordered for them. Not wishing to ask any more questions than were absolutely necessary, he watched this carriage, as it drove away, and followed the road it took. Glancing at the watch he carried, by the light of the last lamp he passed, he saw that it was nearly eight o'clock; and he had, so far as he could judge, nearly eleven miles to go before reaching Bamberton. But his purpose was a strong one, and the night was fine; he set out to walk the distance, knowing that he dared not ask for a lift from any passing cart, lest he should be recognised.

At one or two points on his journey, where sign-posts were too illegible to be read, or the night too dark to see them clearly, he was compelled to wait—fuming and impatient—until such time as a slow-footed, slow-voiced countryman should come in sight. At such times Philip Chater pulled his hat down as far as possible over his face, and kept in the shadow. But he got through each interview safely, until within a mile or two of the village—when taking a wrong turning and losing his bearings hopelessly, he was obliged to wait again, in the hope of some one passing him.

This time, it was a woman; and she civilly directed him—showing him a short cut, which would bring him she said, within a short distance of Chater Hall. He thanked her, and was turning away, when she came rapidly nearer to him, and peered into his face; cried his name, in a sort of shriek; struck at him; and ran off towards some cottages, where lights were gleaming, screaming —“Murder!”

He lost no time in getting away from the spot, and ran as hard as he could in the direction she had indicated. He had heard the deep boom of a church clock strike ten some time before, and his one desperate fear was that he might arrive too late to prevent the robbery. At that thought, he redoubled his efforts, and did not stop until he saw the huge bulk of Chater Hall looming up against the sky.

Hunted—wretched—forn—exhausted, the unhappy man stood, for a few moments, leaning against a tree, and contemplating the place that was rightfully his. He was even in a mood to curse the father who had banished him, and who was sleeping, peacefully enough, in the churchyard near at hand. He almost wished that his own troubles were ended, and that he was beyond the reach of pursuit.

“It’s hard,” he muttered, savagely—“that I, who have never wronged any living creature knowingly, should be in this plight now. If I had had the chance that was given to my brother, should I have used it better—or have I merely kept out of temptation, because temptation kept out of me? Heaven knows! But, while I stand here cursing my fate, those wretches have got to work, I’ll be bound, and may be clear away again before I reach the place. Now to remember the roads I traversed before—and yet to keep out of the sight of all men, and”—he added, as an after-thought—“all women!”

With these words, he crept round, as near as he dared, to the front of the house, and struck off cautiously from there in the direction of the cottage.

Now it happened that night that Madge Barnshaw, being wholly occupied with sad thoughts, and having no friendly being in whom she could confide, or to whom she felt disposed to tell the tragic story which was by this time in every mouth, had gone early to her room, leaving Miss Vint—her distant cousin and guardian—nodding over the fire. Arthur Barnshaw, who had arrived from town only the day before, was in the room he called his “den,” reading and smoking, and the house was very quiet. Miss Vint, being very comfortable, fell asleep.

When she awoke, the fire had long gone out, and the room was chilly. Miss Vint rose, shuddering and yawning, and, having extinguished the light, went out into the hall; took her candle, and slowly and sleepily mounted the stairs to her chamber.

Passing a window on the staircase, immediately below the level of her own room, Miss Vint stopped suddenly, and became very wide awake. Clearly and distinctly, in the death-like silence which pervaded everything, Miss Vint had heard a voice—muffled and cautious—apparently proceeding from below. What the words were that were spoken, she could not say; but she had distinctly heard a voice—and that voice the voice of a man.

Before the worthy lady had had time to decide what to do, another voice—as muffled and cautious as the first—answered; only, in this case, it appeared to come from above—almost as though (but the idea was, of course, too ridiculous to be entertained) the first speaker had been outside, in the garden, and the second at an open window, speaking down at him.

Miss Vint’s first natural thought was to rush downstairs, and summon Arthur Barnshaw to her assistance. But it was a long way downstairs, and there was a dark and ghostly corridor to be traversed before she could reach him. On the other hand, her room was quite close; she had but to dash up three steps, open the door, plunge in, and find herself in safety.

Accordingly, Miss Vint took the plunge; flung open the door—shut it hurriedly—and locked it on the inside. At the same instant, Miss Vint’s candle was softly blown out, and a strong firm hand was placed over Miss Vint’s mouth—a hand which pressed her, not too ceremoniously, against the door she had locked.

“Not a word,” whispered a voice, huskily. “Scream—and I’ll knock yer bloomin’ brains out. I ain’t alone; there’s pals o’ mine outside, as mightn’t be so considerate of a lady’s feelin’s. Now—are yer goin’ to be quiet?”

Miss Vint nodded her head, as well as she could for the steady pressure of the hand upon her mouth, and the man relaxed his hold. She could just dimly discern his figure, looming large above

her, in the dim light which came from outside the window.

"What do you want?" asked Miss Vint, in a frightened whisper.

"We've got wot we want," replied the man, in a low voice—"an' nobody ain't 'urt a bit. I found my way into the young lady's room, without wakin' of 'er—an' now I'll wish you good-night. On'y mind"—the man paused, for a moment, to give his words greater effect—"I've got something 'ere wot'll keep yer quiet, if I 'ears any noise from yer." Miss Vint felt something hard and cold touch her forehead.

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"My good man," whispered Miss Vint, tremulously, "you may be sure I will not place you under the necessity for doing violence upon me. I would only beg that you will join your companions—I hesitate, in your presence, to call them depraved, although I fear they are not what they should be—and leave me in peace. Your friends are evidently impatient to see you." This last was in reference to a low whistle, which sounded from the lawn.

The man, after hesitating for a moment, moved slowly towards the window, which Miss Vint noticed, for the first time, was wide open; and got one leg over the sill; looking back at her, he shook a fist, by way of caution to her to be quiet; lifted the other leg over, and slowly disappeared—apparently down a ladder—from her view.

Then it was that Miss Vint, no longer restrained by the fear of his presence, opened her mouth, and emitted a long and piercing shriek—a shriek so tremendous, that it brought Arthur Barnshaw tumbling out of his den, half asleep, and stumbling blindly in the darkness; and brought another man, who had been crouching behind a hedge, leaping over it, and hurrying to the scene. Having accomplished these useful purposes, Miss Vint backed towards her bed, and fainted away, with propriety and comfort.

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The second man, who had leapt the hedge, was no other than Philip Chater; and, as he hurried to the scene, he caught a momentary glimpse of the little drama that was going forward. In the first place, he saw a man hurriedly and unceremoniously coming down a ladder from a window; saw him thrust something into the hands of another man, who stood near at hand, and make off in another direction, clearing the low hedge at a bound, and vanishing in the darkness. While this was happening, the door of the house had been wrenched open from inside, and a young man had dashed out, and grappled with a taller figure, standing also near the ladder—a taller figure which, after a short struggle, threw the man who grappled with him, and made off also, in the same direction as the first. All this passed within a few seconds, and before Philip had had time to do anything. But he saw, at this moment, that the man into whose hands that something had been thrust, by the man who had come down the ladder, was making off also—not with the strength of the others, but as though he were older and weaker. This man Philip Chater immediately seized; when, to his consternation, the man in his grip—(and who was no other than our friend Dr. Cripps)—after one horrified glance into his face, fell upon his knees, babbling and stuttering; and then, casting from him what he held, broke away, and went careering like a madman across the garden.

Philip, for his part, was so astonished, that he made no effort to follow the little man; but, seeing something gleaming, in the faint light of the stars, on the ground at his feet, stooped, and picked it up. Having dropped on one knee in doing this, he was absolutely powerless to defend himself, when a man sprang upon him, caught him by the throat, and forced him backwards to the ground.

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"I've got one of you, at least," cried a voice which sounded curiously familiar. "It's no use struggling; you won't get away, I can assure you." Then, as he caught sight of the face of his prisoner, he dropped his hands from Philip's throat, and struggled to his feet, and stood staring down at him. It was Arthur Barnshaw.

For a moment or two, there was a death-like silence between the two men; then Philip spoke, although he knew that what he had to say would sound futile and absurd.

"I—I heard that this robbery was to be committed—and I came here, as rapidly as I could, in the hope to prevent it," he said, in a low voice.

Barnshaw's voice was cold and hard when he replied. "Indeed? How did you hear of it?"

"In—in London—quite by accident."

"What is that you have in your hand?" asked Barnshaw, in the same tone.

Philip slowly raised his hand, which held the thing Dr. Cripps had dropped, and held it up in the light; it sparkled and glittered, and threw back a hundred changing brilliancies to the night.

"It is my sister's necklace," said Barnshaw. "Give it to me." Then, as he took it in his hand, he said slowly—"This was taken out of the house to-night, by the men who have escaped. They have all got away—except yourself—"

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"Good God, Barnshaw," faltered the other—"you surely don't think—"

"You knew that the robbery was to be committed; so much, on your own confession. I find you hiding in the garden, with this actually in your hands." Without another word, he turned, and walked slowly back to the house.

For some moments, Philip knelt upon the ground where the other had left him, staring after Barnshaw like one stunned. Then, slowly and heavily, he rose from his knees and went out of the garden, with bowed head, and without once looking round.

Meanwhile, Dr. Cripps, being incapable of the feat of agility which had carried his friends over the hedge, went crashing straight through it; ducked suddenly, and ran along on the other side, beneath it, in order to keep out of the view of any one who might be on the lookout for him. And,

running thus, he dashed straight into the arms of a man who was also crouching down behind it. After a very brief struggle, feeling himself in a grip from which it was impossible to escape, he resigned himself to circumstances, remained passive, and looked up at his captor.

“Ogledon!” he ejaculated. “I thought it was a policeman!”

The man into whose hands he had fallen shook him until his teeth seemed to rattle, and whispered angrily—“So you’ve bungled it, have you?—rousing the house in that fashion. Who’s got the necklace?”

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“D-D-Dandy C-C-Chater!” stuttered Cripps, faintly.

The man dropped him, as hurriedly as though he had been red-hot; looked all about him; and seemed to breathe hard.

“What do you mean? What the devil are you talking about?” He spoke in what seemed almost a frightened whisper.

The little man, bewildered alike by the shaking, and by the sudden change in the demeanour of Ogledon, lost his balance completely, and stammered out—

“It’s no good—the devil is in everything. I fished him out of the river only this very day, and laid him on the bank, as dead as twenty doornails; yet he caught me in the garden here just now, and stared straight into my eyes—and he’s got the diamond necklace!”

“You’re mad!” whispered the other, in the same uneasy fashion.

“I’m not—I’m not—but I soon shall be!” muttered Cripps. “I tell you that Dandy Chater is dead—been dead for days; and yet he’s got the necklace, and is in that garden”—he pointed awfully behind him, as he spoke—“at the present moment. As sure as I’m a living sinner—Dandy Chater has come to life again!”

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WANTED—A DEAD MAN!

For quite a long minute, Ogledon stared at the trembling Cripps—knitting his brows, and biting his lips at him—the while he turned this thing over in his mind. And the more he stared at Cripps, the more did that gentleman continue to babble of Dandy Chater dead, and Dandy Chater alive and with the diamond necklace. Presently, the strong common sense of the bigger man seemed to assert itself; he caught Cripps by the shoulder, and shook him again, and compelled his attention.

“Now—listen to me, you chattering idiot!” he said. “Are you certain that you took Dandy Chater’s body from the river?”

Dr. Cripps nodded vehemently. “Certain of it,” he replied.

“Where?”

“Just below Woolwich.”

“Just as I thought,” muttered Ogledon to himself. Aloud, he said,—“You’ve been drinking, you little scoundrel, and the sight of a body has upset you. You’ve been drinking spirits—and seeing ’em afterwards. Now—listen to me again; it will be worth your while. This Dandy Chater, being dead, everything he possesses belongs to me; I am the next-of-kin. I’m going now straight to Chater Hall; you’ll have to go with me; and your business will be to hold your tongue, and follow all that I do, and take your cue from me. Dandy Chater come to life again!” he added, with a sneer, giving Cripps a final shake, and casting him roughly off. “You’re killing yourself with all the liquor you take, my friend.”

After listening carefully for some little time, and hearing no disturbing sounds to break the silence all about them, he set off cautiously in the direction of the Hall, followed closely by Cripps. And, as he went along, he reviewed his position.

“Now—I must not forget,” he muttered to himself—“that I have but just returned from a journey, and know nothing of what has happened in my absence. If they know of Dandy’s death, I must be properly horrified at the news; if he has merely disappeared, and they have heard nothing of him—(which I suspect will be the case)—I must be filled with surprise and alarm accordingly. In any case, I play the innocent, and take advantage of what I know, and of what turns up. And I must carry off everything with a bold face.”

Acting upon this resolve, Ogledon made his way to Chater Hall, and loudly rang the bell. It being now nearly midnight, the house was in complete darkness; but, after a time, shuffling feet were heard within, bolts were drawn, and the great doors were slowly opened. Ogledon, advancing boldly, with Cripps sticking close at his heels, confronted a couple of astonished and sleepy-eyed men-servants; pushed past them, and went into the great dining-room.

“Evening, Simms—evening, Barker—or, perhaps I should say, almost morning,” said Ogledon, pleasantly. “I’ve only just arrived from a long journey, and am tired and hungry. You need not disturb any one else; I dare say you can get me—and my friend here,” he added, as an after-thought—“something to eat, and to drink. Anything cold will do; only be quick.”

The men hastened away, to do his bidding. But, just at that moment, a sharp clear voice sounded from upstairs, calling to the men, and demanding to know who had arrived.

Ogledon, listening intently, heard the men give his name, and state what they were doing for his comfort. But this did not appear to satisfy the owner of the voice; for, a few moments afterwards, a rustle of garments was heard on the staircase, and then in the hall; and, the door opening, displayed the figure of Mrs. Dolman the housekeeper, in an antiquated wrapper, and with a light shawl over her head.

“Truly, Mr. Ogledon—truly, gentlemen”—this latter, as she caught sight of Cripps—“I trust you will excuse so informal a reception. Of course, had we expected you, preparation should have been made, and the servants waiting. But, of course, I did not know—”

“Of course not, Mrs. Dolman—of course not,” broke in Ogledon, cheerfully. “No excuses are necessary, I assure you; both myself and my friend—permit me; Dr. Cripps—Mrs. Dolman—the worthy housekeeper here—are quite prepared to take pot-luck, I can assure you.”

Now, when the housekeeper had entered the room, Dr. Cripps, after one momentary glance at her, had turned his back, and pretended to be busy with some books upon a side table; but, having now to turn, in acknowledgment of the introduction, he gave the old lady one searching glance, bowed, and turned away again. But not before she had looked quite as keenly at him, and had clasped her hands, in sudden recognition and astonishment.

“Well—dear me!” cried Mrs. Dolman—“if my eyes do not deceive me, I am known to this gentleman—though it’s many years since I had the pleasure—”

“You are perfectly right,” replied Cripps grudgingly, seeing that there was no help for it. “I am the Dr. Cripps who used to practice in this place, and who—”

“Who brought Master Dandy into the world!” cried the old woman, clasping her hands again.

The Doctor nodded, and turned away, as if to put an end to the conversation; Ogledon was watching him curiously.

"And little did I think, those many years ago, that ever it should have come to this, gentlemen," went on the old lady, with tears starting to her eyes—"with Master Dandy gone, God knows where, and lying tongues wagging about him, and he not here to defend himself."

Ogledon took her up quickly. "Lying tongues, Mrs. Dolman? And what, pray, are they daring to say about our dear Dandy?"

"It seems, sir, that there has been a body found—of a young girl who belonged to these parts—in a wood near by; and, because Master Dandy has been seen talking to her once or twice—as young men will, and always have done, since the good Lord made young men and women!—they must needs go whispering about that Master Dandy made away with her."

Ogledon drew in his breath sharply, and rose from his seat; confronted Mrs. Dolman for a moment, in an amazed silence; and finally spoke, in a voice which shook a little with his anxiety.

"I don't understand," he said. "Do you suggest that Mr. Chater is accused of murder?"

"That's what they dare to say, sir," replied the old lady. "And as he's been gone from here—and left no word as to where he is—since Wednesday—"

Ogledon, who had turned partially from her, even while he listened intently to all she said, swung round quickly, and interrupted her. "My good woman—what day did you say?"

"Wednesday, sir. Master Dandy went from here very late."

Ogledon looked at her, for a moment, in blank amazement and terror; put his hand to his shirt collar, and tugged at it, as though he found a difficulty in breathing; moved away a step or two, and then came back to her, smiling in rather a ghastly fashion. He spoke with some little impatience, and yet very clearly and distinctly.

"I—I want to be very—very clear about this, Mrs. Dolman," he said, speaking in a gasping, breathless sort of fashion, as one deeply agitated, and yet striving to keep control of himself. "I—I have been away in France—Paris—and have only just returned. Mr. Chater and I, as you know, left here a week ago—a week this night—I went to London in the morning—he came on late at night, and met me there. We—we parted—that night; I"—the man passed his hand quickly over his forehead, and tugged again at his shirt collar—"I have not seen him since."

"Well, sir," replied the housekeeper—"he came back the next day, sir—Saturday—"

The expression on Ogledon's face stopped her; she looked at him uneasily. He recovered his composure somewhat, and was about to start again to question her on that disquieting matter, when the two servants entered the room, with the materials for supper. Dr. Cripps had, long before this, discovered a decanter of spirits, and had been helping himself rather liberally to the contents. He came up to the table now, still carrying the decanter, and moaning out a song in a wheezy and cracked voice; sat down, with the decanter at his elbow, and—utterly oblivious of every one else—began his supper; taking a great deal to drink, and very little to eat.

Ogledon being in no mood, with that question still unanswered, for any meal, waited until the men had withdrawn, and then once more approached Mrs. Dolman. White-faced and in deadly anxiety though he was, his smile was soft and kindly, and his voice—albeit a trifle impatient at times of what he supposed to be the good woman's perversity—as soft and kindly as his smile.

"Now—my dear Mrs. Dolman—pray excuse my pestering you with questions at such an hour, I beg—I am desperately anxious about my cousin, Mr. Chater. You say you saw him on Saturday; are you sure you are not confusing the dates?"

It was the housekeeper's turn to stare now; after doing so for a moment, in evident perplexity, she shook her head vigorously. "No, Mr. Ogledon—certainly not," she said; "Master Dandy came down on Saturday—driving from the station in a fly. I sent down to ask if you were expected, sir—and he said he did not know."

Here a remarkable and ghostly interruption came, in the form of a long wailing chant from Dr. Cripps, who suddenly broke forth, in a quavering treble, with a stave of—"Down Among the Dead Men." Ogledon, turning furiously, fell upon his friend, and shook him so vigorously, that the little man seemed, for a few moments, in danger of being shaken out of existence altogether. When, however, Ogledon desisted, Cripps merely looked round about him dizzily; smiled, quite as though it were an exercise to which he was accustomed; and set to work drinking harder than ever.

Meantime, Ogledon had turned again to the housekeeper—and began once more to peg away at that subject of the dead man, as though he could never leave it alone.

"Did—did Mr. Chater seem—seem well?" he asked, with some assumption of carelessness.

"I never saw him looking better, Mr. Ogledon," replied the housekeeper, tranquilly. "And now, gentlemen," she added—"seeing that you have all you require, I will take the liberty of going to bed."

"By all means," responded Ogledon, appearing to wake suddenly from a heavy musing fit which had been upon him. "By all means, Mrs. Dolman. You are quite sure, Mrs. Dolman—quite sure that you have made no mistake about the date?"

"Quite certain, Mr. Ogledon," she replied, a little coldly. "I am not likely to make such mistakes as that, sir; it was impressed upon me the more, perhaps, because Master Dandy got up very early the next morning—Sunday that was—and afterwards went to church."

"Dandy Chater went to church!" exclaimed Ogledon; and, at the mere suggestion of such a thing, he smiled in good earnest, despite the seriousness of the matter to him. His face cleared a little; he

seemed to see an easy solution of the business. "My good soul—you have certainly been dreaming; Dandy Chater would never have gone to church!"

Mrs. Dolman looked at him for a moment, in majestic silence; drew herself up to her full height, as though about to make a withering speech; remembered her position, and merely bade him "Good-night"; and walked, in a stately fashion, from the room.

For a long time, Ogledon paced the room restlessly—stopping every now and then, on the opposite side of the table to Cripps (who had fallen asleep, with an arm thrown lovingly round the decanter) to look at that gentleman doubtfully, as though half inclined to wake him, and endeavour to get something out of him. But at last, a new thought striking him, he rang the bell, and waited near the door until one of the sleepy men-servants answered the summons.

"Simms," he said—not looking at the man, but keeping his eyes fixed on the floor—"has Harry Routley gone to bed?"

"Hours ago, sir," replied the man.

"Wake him at once; tell him I want to see him."

Some ten minutes later, Harry knocked at the door, and came in; having dressed hurriedly, and having all the appearance of one roused unexpectedly from sleep. Ogledon nodded to him, with a smile.

"Harry—I'm sorry to trouble you, at such an hour as this, but I am worried about Mr. Chater."

At the mention of that name, the lad suddenly became rigid, and set his lips, as though with the determination to say nothing. Ogledon, after a pause, went on again, evidently disconcerted.

"We—Mr. Chater and I—have somehow—somehow missed each other. I was called—called abroad; I parted from him rather—hurriedly. Coming back to-night I hear from Mrs. Dolman that he—that he has gone away again."

"Yes, sir. Last Wednesday."

If Harry had suddenly dealt Ogledon a heavy blow, he could not have staggered or surprised him more. Recovering instantly, however, he came at the other with a rush, and caught him by the throat; his dark face almost livid with passion.

"You hound!" he said, in a sort of hoarse whisper—"this is a trick—a lying tale, hatched up amongst you here. Do you want to drive me mad?" Then, seeing the look of blank amazement and growing wrath in the other's eyes, his mood changed swiftly, and he dropped his hands, and passed one over his forehead, in the same nervous fashion as before. "I—I beg your pardon, Harry; I had no right to speak to you in such a way. But I—I have been ill—and am faint—faint and weak, from a long journey, and but little food. Take—take a glass of wine, Harry—and then answer me clearly."

He turned to the table, and poured out wine with a shaking hand; carried it—spilling a little as he did so—to the lad. But Harry shook his head, and seemed to put away the glass with his hand. He was suspicious of every one and everything at that time.

"I can answer you quite clearly, sir," he said, brusquely.

"Mr. Chater went with me to London—not with me, but on the same day; we met in London—a week ago. I have not seen him since. Have you?" He seemed to listen for the answer of the other, as though his life hung upon it.

"Yes, sir. Master Dandy came down the next day, quite unexpectedly; went to church—"

Ogledon signed to him with his hand to go away. "That will do," he said. "You can go to bed."

When he was left alone in the room with the sleeping Cripps, he went almost mechanically, as it seemed, to the table, and unsteadily poured out some brandy, and drank it. Then, with an awful eager hurry upon him, he ran round the table, and caught Cripps by the shoulders, and dragged him to his feet.

"Wake up, you drunken fool—wake up!" he cried, in a voice but little greater than a whisper. "I shall go mad, if I stop here alone, with this thing weighing upon me. Come—open your eyes; listen to what I have to say!"

Dr. Cripps, striving hard to go to sleep again, even while held upright by his friend, tried a line or two of his former lugubrious ditty, and smiled feebly. Ogledon, all impatience however, brought him rapidly to something of sobriety, by unceremoniously emptying the remains of a glass of spirits over him; whereupon he shuddered, and shivered, and opened his eyes fully; and stood upright without assistance.

"Now, Cripps—just attend to me—for I mean business. If you deceive me, by so much as a word, it'll be the worse for you. You tell me you took this body from the river? What day was that?"

The Doctor blinked his eyelids, moistened his lips with his tongue, and looked extraordinarily grave. "Thish afternoon—no—thish is to-morrow mornin'—ain't it? Yeshterday afternoon, I mean—"

"I know what you mean; you mean a few hours since—say, ten or a dozen—eh?" cried Ogledon, impatiently, yet always in that low, cautious tone.

"Thash it," replied the Doctor, fast merging into sleep again.

"Very well then. You understand your business, I suppose; how long had this man—this body—been in the water?"

"Five—shix days—p'raps a week," said the other. Then, suddenly becoming more sober, at the

recollection of what had so recently happened, the little man waved his arms wildly, and exclaimed, in his thin piping voice—"But that's nothing—nothing 't all. Dandy Chater came to meeting; took bank-notes—his own—yours, too—"

"What the devil are you talking about?" cried Ogledon, almost as wildly as the other. "What meeting—what notes?"

"Tuesday. The boys divided up—share and share alike—Dandy took yours and his own. And to-night—ugh!—he was in that damned garden, and took the necklace. He takes everything."

Ogledon wiped his face, and even his hands, and poured out more brandy. Drinking it, he looked over the top of the glass at Cripps; set the glass down, and stood nervously beating his hands together, and biting his lips.

"Cripps," he said at last, in a whisper—"this thing has got the better of me. As sure as Heaven, Dandy Chater is—is dead."

The Doctor saw something in Ogledon's eyes which completely sobered him; he sank down helplessly in a chair. "You don't mean—" he began.

Ogledon nodded. "We—we had a row. We've had—had rows before. Besides—the fool was in my way—in my way everywhere. I'd got out of him all I wanted. I followed him down to the river, a week ago, and struck him down there—from behind. I know he was dead; I felt for his heart. Then I made a bolt for it; got to Paris, so as to be out of the way—and came back here only to-day. I've watched the papers, for a week; I came back, expecting to hear that the body had been found, and that this house was in mourning. Cripps—as Heaven's above us, there is some devilish Thing going about—from the grave—from anywhere you will—in the likeness of this man we both know to be dead."

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The little Doctor was trembling from head to foot; not sober enough yet to understand the magnitude of the thing, and having, after that lapse of twenty-eight years, but a dim and fleeting recollection of the birth at Chater Hall. Indeed, then, as now, he had been always in so hazy a condition, that it is doubtful if he remembered the real circumstances.

"It has been seen at this meeting; it came here; it dogged us to-night. I'm—I'm choking, Cripps; I must have one of these windows open."

He crossed the room hurriedly, and flung back a heavy curtain, which hung across the long French window which opened on to the terrace. But, the next moment, he started back with a scream, and covered his face with his hands; for there, in the clear cold light of the moon, stood the living image of Dandy Chater, looking calmly at him.

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INSPECTOR TOKELY IS EMPHATIC

In one of the many rooms of that barrack-like building, which harbours so many guilty secrets, and is so learned in many shady ways of life, and is known to all and sundry as Scotland Yard, there worked—with long intervals for mysterious disappearances into various parts of the country—a small man, with a hard, expressionless face, ornamented with a tuft of greyish hair on the chin.

This man had once had the extraordinary good fortune to pick up a vital piece of evidence—literally, to trip over it; for it was right in his way, and he could not well avoid it. But it brought him into prominent notice; it got him talked about; and, as he was wise enough to appear absolutely impassive, when complimented by his superior officers, and even by a great and bewigged Judge on the Bench, he gained greater credit still; was spoken of with bated breath, by criminals acquainted, by experience, with some of the intricacies of the Yard; and sagely nodded over by those in authority. Then, one lucky chance following another, he rose up, by dint of that hard expressionless face, to something greater still; and, steering clear of blunders, and getting other men with brains to secure information for him, blossomed at last into Inspector Tokely, of the Criminal Investigation Department.

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Now, this same Inspector Tokely was a native of the small and unimportant village of Bamberton; had come up from it, indeed, as a raw youth, to enter the police force in London. So that, when news came of the murder of poor Patience Miller, and a request that the matter might be investigated, Inspector Tokely, instead of sending a subordinate, determined to combine business with pleasure, and to see his native place. Thus it came about that the great little man descended on the village, early on the afternoon preceding Philip's night adventure in the garden, and stirred the already startled community of yokels to its depths.

Reversing the copybook maxim, Inspector Tokely determined to take pleasure before business, and to flutter with envy the bosoms of his former acquaintances. Therefore he put up, with some ostentation, at the Chater Arms; and took his expressionless face, with its dependent tuft, into the bar of that hostelry, when some half-dozen village celebrities were assembled in it. Old Betty Siggs, being busy at the moment, and not having set eyes upon him since his boyhood, failed to notice his entry, or to recognise him other than as a casual visitor. The Inspector, looking down from his height of superior importance and criminal experience on the mere hinds on whom Mrs. Siggs was attending, coughed vigorously to attract her attention, and dropped his portmanteau with a bang upon the floor. Mrs. Siggs, smiling and pleasant, came across, and civilly enquired what she could do for him.

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"I shall sleep here for a night—possibly two or three," replied Tokely, in a loud voice, and with a side glance to note the effect of what he said upon the mere hinds before-mentioned. "I am here upon—upon business."

"Indeed, sir," said Mrs. Siggs, briskly. "It ain't many commercial gents we gets down to Bamberton, sir—'cept by accident. Would you wish to 'ave a meal prepared, sir? P'raps you'd be so good as step this way, sir."

"I should like something to eat, certainly," replied the Inspector. "And I am not here on commercial business; quite the contrary. My business is connected with the—the Law."

"Lor'!" exclaimed Mrs. Siggs, as she led the way into the little parlour; this exclamation not being intended as an echo of the Inspector's last word, by any means. "I 'ope we shall be able to make you comfortable, sir, w'atever your business may be. This way, sir. P'raps you might like to take a little summink afore your meal, sir?"

Inspector Tokely gave the order for the "little summink," as well as for the meal, and then turned to Mrs. Siggs as she was leaving the room. "One moment, my good woman," he said.

Mrs. Siggs hesitated, with her hand on the doorknob, and looked at him curiously—not at all prepossessed in his favour. The Inspector, leaning against the table, and putting his head a little on one side, conveyed into his hard features something as nearly approaching a smile as he was capable of.

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"You don't know me, I suppose?" he said.

Mrs. Siggs shook her head slowly, after looking him up and down for a few moments in some perplexity.

"I see you don't," said Tokely, grimly. "Do you remember a lad—a lad of superior intelligence, I might say—who used to be a sort of under-keeper up at the Hall—by name Tokely?" The Inspector smiled a little more.

Mrs. Siggs, after a moment or two of frowning contemplation of the floor, looked up at him with a brightening face. "To be sure I do," she said. "When I was a gel about 'ere—remember 'im well, I do. Let me see now"—Betty Siggs, immersed in recollections of the past, lost sight of her visitor for a moment completely—"chuckle-headed chap 'e was—with a taste for spyin' out things wot didn't concern 'im—"

"He was nothing of the sort," broke in Tokely, very red in the face. "He was a lad considerably above the average of rustic intelligence—and he made his way in the world, Ma'am, I should like you to know—got his name in the papers, more than once—"

"Ah—lots o' folks manages to do that, without meanin' it," said Betty Siggs, with a little laugh. "I've knowed a man to do it by breakin' a winder."

"Never mind about that," said the Inspector, testily. "The young man I'm talking about got on in the world, by sheer merit. *I am that young man, Ma'am*"—the Inspector tapped himself dramatically on the breast—"now Inspector Tokely, of Scotland Yard!"

Betty Siggs went a little white about the region of her plump cheeks; clasped her hands; and faltered out—"Of—of Scotland Yard."

"Criminal Investigation Department, Ma'am," went on the Inspector, tapping himself on the breast again. "Have the goodness, Ma'am, to shut that door."

Mrs. Siggs put a hand out, to do as she was bidden, never taking her eyes for a moment from the face before her. Indeed, after shutting the door, she stood with her hand upon the knob, as though ready to pull it open in an instant, and scream for assistance, if necessary.

"Now, Ma'am," began Tokely, wagging his head and a forefinger at her, by way of caution—"I want to ask you a question or two; and I'll trouble you to be very careful what you say, or what you don't say. I have been commissioned to enquire into a case, touching a certain female of the name"—he pulled a pocketbook from his coat, and dived into it for a moment—"of the name of Patience Miller. Now, this same Patience Miller—"

Betty Siggs suddenly threw up her hands, and clapped them over her ears. Performing a species of little dance, entirely on her own account, with her two feet, she shut her eyes, and called out—"Stop—stop—it ain't no use! If you puts me on the rack, and draws me out till I'm as thin as the four-ale over the way (and there can't be anythink much thinner than *that*)—you won't get nothink out of me. I know no more than anybody else—not so much, in fact—and what I does know I ain't agoin' to tell."

"So you defy the Law—do you?" roared Tokely—for, Betty Siggs still keeping her hands tightly pressed upon her ears, there was no other way to make himself heard. But Betty Siggs did not wait to hear an account of whatever terrors might be in store for her; watching her opportunity, she wrenched open the door, and darted through into the bar, where—judging by a confused murmur, which presently sprang up, of heavy rustic tongues, leavened pretty strongly by her own shrill voice—she immediately began to stir up war against Inspector Tokely.

Nor did the Inspector see her again for some time. His meal was served to him by a very pretty black-eyed girl, who—evidently secretly instructed by Mrs. Siggs, returned evasive answers to his questions, and remained in the room as little as possible. The Inspector, having refreshed himself, at his country's expense, to the very best of his ability—sallied forth again into the bar, with a general view, as he would have expressed it, of "keeping an eye on things."

There was no one in the bar; but, glancing through a side door, Tokely had a view of a very snug inner room, where three persons were seated, in the glow of a small fire, very comfortably. One of these persons was Mrs. Siggs herself; the second, the black-eyed damsel who had waited upon him; and the third, a man of some sixty years of age, with a round, jolly, innocent face, half hidden by an enormous grey beard and moustache, and faintly illuminated by a pair of sleepy good-tempered blue eyes.

This man was reading a newspaper, following the words and sentences in a sort of low comfortable growl, like the purring of a huge cat by the fire; Mrs. Siggs was stitching away busily, in a sharp energetic fashion, which denoted that her temper had been ruffled; the girl was sitting, with her eyes pensively fixed on the fire, and her hands clasped in her lap.

The room appeared so very comfortable, and the Inspector had so clearly made up his mind to devote the remainder of that day to pleasure, leaving the more serious business of his visit until the morrow, that he advanced his head a little into the room, and enquired whether he might come in.

"You look so very cosy here, you know," he said, "and I'm quite sure you couldn't be hard on a lonely man, who has nobody to talk to," he added, in an appealing tone.

"Depends a good bit on what you want to talk about," said Mrs. Siggs quickly, without glancing up from her work. "We don't want no Law 'ere, my friend."

The man who was reading the paper glanced up mildly, and pushed his chair back a little from the fire. "Them as comes in the way of trade, my angel," he said as slowly and heavily as though he were spelling the words out of the newspaper in his hand—"as a right to come where they will, if so be—"

"Oh—I dessay," interrupted Mrs. Siggs, wrathfully. "W'y don't you 'ave the 'ole Noah's Ark in to tea, w'ile you're about it, an' 'am to cut the bread and butter for 'em."

Inspector Tokely, feeling that he had received as much encouragement as he was likely to get, passed into the room, and sat down. After a few moments, he ventured to suggest a little refreshment for himself and his host—even delicately hinting that Mrs. Siggs might be tempted to partake of a glass at his expense. Mrs. Siggs, relenting a little, passed into the bar to get what was required; and the visitor, feeling the necessity for ingratiating himself as much as possible with them all, turned to the girl.

"Your mother, I suppose, Miss?" he asked, edging a little nearer to her.

The girl glanced at him for moment—nodded—and looked again at the fire.

"And a fine looking mother, too," went on Tokely, feeling that it was more uphill work than he had anticipated. "You, sir"—he turned to the man with the newspaper—"ought to be proud of such a

wife and daughter." This at a venture, for he knew nothing of the relationship they bore to each other.

"W'en I fust drawed near to Betty—t' other side the earth—there was a matter of nine men—one on 'em nigh on to eighty—a makin' eyes at 'er, an' even goin' so far as to sleep on 'er doorstep. I polished off as many as I could get at, and spoke words of kind advice (as was throwed away on 'im) to the old 'un—an' drove 'er nigh a 'underd mile to see a parson. An' she were then as fine a woman—or finer—than any in them parts." He laid down his newspaper—picked it up again—and finished his remarks. "W'ich so she are now."

It was at this moment that Betty Siggs came in from the bar, with a little tray, on which stood some glasses and a jug of water; but she no sooner entered the room, than she stopped dead—uttered an exclamation—and let fall the tray and its contents.

Inspector Tokely had had his eyes fixed upon Mr. Siggs, so that he almost faced her as she came in; yet he could have sworn that, in the half glance he had of her, she had been looking straight over his head. Turning swiftly—so soon at least as he had got out of the way of the flowing liquids—he saw that, at the spot to which her eyes had been directed, was a window, partly shrouded by a curtain. Looking at Mrs. Siggs again, however, he came reluctantly to the conclusion that he must have been mistaken; for that excellent woman, with much laughter at her own carelessness, was picking up the glasses, and rearranging them on the tray.

"There's a butter-fingers for you!" she exclaimed. "Never knowed myself to do that before. It's tryin' to do too much at once; that's wot it is. Howsever, it ain't no use cryin' over spilt milk—or spilt spirits; an' I'm a keepin' everybody waitin' for their liquor."

In a moment, she bustled out again, appearing to be in a much better temper than before—indeed, quite desirous of making herself pleasant to every one, and propitiating the guest as much as possible. On coming back, she was careful to a nicety about mixing his drink, and even suggested he should taste it, to be sure that it was to his liking, before she proceeded to mix the others. Yet there was about all her movements a certain fluttering anxiety which had not been there before.

"Pon my word, Clara," she exclaimed suddenly—"I never see sich a girl in all my days! Fancy lightin' up the gas, an' never drawin' the curtain even; wot could you 'ave bin a thinkin' about?"

She bustled across to the window, and pulled the curtain sharply across it; yet seemed to look out of it for a moment, too, the Inspector thought, before doing so. She came back to her seat—a seat which faced that window—and gaily pledged the two men with her glass. But immediately afterwards, she got up, and moved towards the door.

"Toby, old boy—I wish you'd come and see to this 'ere tap for a minute," she called out; and Toby Siggs got up heavily, and followed her.

Immediately Inspector Tokely rose also, and strolled—quite casually, as it seemed—across the room. Coming to the window, he said—apparently for the benefit of Clara—"I wonder what sort of a night it is"—and jerked back the curtain again.

Outside the window, however, was nothing but black darkness; after a moment, the Inspector turned away, half making up his mind that he must have been mistaken, and resumed his seat. At the same moment, Mr. and Mrs. Siggs came in, evidently on the best possible terms with each other, from the bar.

Now, it was a curious thing that Mrs. Siggs, after one glance at the bared window, made no further remark about it; nor did Mr. Siggs. Further than that, Toby Siggs suddenly developed an extraordinary liking for the Inspector, and a mad desire to be convivial with him, quite out of keeping with his general character. For he slapped that respected man upon the back; forced his glass upon him; ran out into the bar to fill it himself, the moment it was empty, insisting that it should be at his expense; and altogether woke up wonderfully. More than that, the Inspector, after sipping his renewed glass, pronounced it to be mighty good stuff—but rather stronger, he thought, than the last; however, he drank it, and it seemed to loosen his tongue in an extraordinary fashion.

He mentioned—as between friends—that he had a warrant in his pocket—to be used if necessary—against a certain person whom he would not name; proclaimed himself a cautious man; but hinted at murder, and darkly suggested that a certain person would find him a remarkably tough fellow to get over.

The Inspector had had his glass replenished for the fourth time, and was so well pleased with himself, that he had begun to wag his head, and wink upon Mrs. Siggs, when another strange thing happened. Clara, who had been sitting all this time, looking, for the most part, at the fire, and occasionally at the Inspector, suddenly seemed to cry out; checked the cry with a fit of hysterical laughter, which may have been induced by some remark of Tokely's; and ran—still laughing in that strange fashion—from the room.

The Inspector, after recovering from the little shock occasioned by Clara's behaviour, appeared to be falling asleep. Betty Siggs, with a watchful eye upon him, drew nearer to her husband.

"Toby," she whispered breathlessly, stretching out a hand to draw him towards her, and still keeping an eye upon Tokely—"e's come back again. Clara must 'ave seed 'im."

"Can't think w'y 'e should be a 'angin' about 'ere—a shovin' 'is 'ead into danger like this," whispered Toby in reply. "'E's 'ad a long start—an' might 'ave bin miles away afore this. W'ere's Clara gone?"

Betty Siggs made a hasty movement with her hand to silence him; for Tokely was waking up again.

At the same moment, a noise was heard in the rear of the house, and the next instant a small door in the further corner of the room was thrust open, and Harry Routley burst in. He was wild looking, and in a fearful state of excitement; without pause, he bounded into the middle of the room, and faced the astonished Tokely, who had risen hurriedly to his feet. Betty Siggs must have seen that in his face which appalled her, for she cried out suddenly, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"Is there a man here," cried Harry, looking round upon them all, "who wants to find the murderer of Patience Miller?"

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Before any one could speak, and while the energy of the lad still held them dumb, a figure darted in at the open doorway, and caught him in its arms, and fell at his feet. It was Clara Siggs.

"Harry," she cried, hiding her face against his leg, and still clutching him desperately—"for the love of God, be silent! For the love of all the good angels—don't betray him!"

A sort of fierce struggle seemed to go on, for a moment, in the lad's breast; finally, looking down at her, he stooped, and caught her half roughly by the arm, and released himself—stepping back a little, so that she trailed over the floor after him.

"Harry! Harry!" was all she said, with a sort of sob in her voice.

"Is there a man here who wants the murderer of Patience Miller?" he cried again. "I've seen him, not a moment since; I know which way he's gone. I found him talking with this—this girl. I'll lead any man to him; I'll track him down anywhere. Who wants him?"

"I'm your man," cried Tokely, advancing to him, sobered by the scene he had witnessed. "Who's the man?"

"Harry! Harry!" wailed the girl again, without rising, or looking up.

The lad seemed to choke down something in his throat, before he spoke. "Dandy Chater," he said, after a moment's pause.

"That's my man," cried Tokely, bringing his fist down heavily on the table. "And for a thousand pounds I'll have Dandy Chater to-night, before I sleep! Come on!"

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Catching Harry by the arm, and snatching up his own hat, he hurried with him out of the still open door, and vanished in the darkness.

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BETTY SIGGS DREAMS A DREAM

The girl rose slowly from the ground, after the two men had disappeared, and, still sobbing heavily, made her way towards the door which led to the upper part of the house. But her mother, brought to herself by the movement, advanced rapidly, and caught her in her arms.

"Child," she said, in a sort of gasp—"this ain't no time for callin' folks names, or talkin' about rights and wrongs. Quick—what's i' the wind? I see Master Dandy a lookin' in at that winder—straight at me; what's i' the wind, child—and w'ere have they gone?"

For some moments, Clara Siggs could not speak; her sobs seemed to shake her from head to foot. But, after a little time, she grew more calm, and told what she knew.

"I saw him—looking in at the window; he beckoned to me. Then, when I slipped out to him, I was frightened at first, because he seemed so worn-looking, and so strange. But he kept saying, again and again, that he wanted to see you—that he could not go away, without seeing you. And, in spite of all they have said, I could not believe, somehow, when I looked into his eyes, that he could have done such a cruel and wicked deed as that." Here her sobs broke out afresh, so that Betty had much ado to comfort her.

"There, there—don't cry, child," she said. "Crying never mended any think yet. Wot else did 'e say?"

"He asked who the man was with us; and, when I told him, he laughed, and said he would give him a run for his money, anyway."

"Spoke like a Chater—that was!" cried Betty, with considerable pride. "Then wot 'appened?"

"Master Dandy said that as it wouldn't be safe to see you, he would make across the fields, so as to get clear of Bamberton, and walk on the way to London. Then, as I was crying, he put his arm round my shoulders—indeed, indeed, there was no shame in it, mother dear—and told me not to mind, for he would clear himself yet. And just at that moment, I heard a rustling in the hedge, and Harry jumped through."

Toby Siggs looked long at his daughter; slowly shook his head; and delivered himself of this piece of wisdom. "The good Lord, with the willin' 'elp of yer mother, made ye fair-lookin' an' put bright eyes into your face; but neither the good Lord nor your mother meant as 'ow they should be a snare, or in any way deludin'. One lad is good enough for the best o' gels. Go to bed—an' think well on it!"

Clara, still sobbing, took her way slowly upstairs. For a long time, Toby Siggs and his wife sat in whispered conversation; Toby saying but little, but probably thinking the more. The shadow of that crime in the wood seemed to have fallen even on that quiet household; Betty Siggs watched the dying fire; and her mind travelled back, through the years to the farm in Australia, on the edge of the Bush, and to the bright-faced lad that cruel Bush had swallowed up, and snatched from her. Old Toby Siggs knew the story; for, when first he had met her, she had had to account for the presence of the child; but Toby was a silent man, and the lost boy was as far back in the mists of the dead years, as in the mists of Toby's brain.

"It's all been a muddle, Toby," said Mrs. Siggs at last, still in the same cautious whisper. "If the old Squire could only know what has happened, I think 'e'd be a bit sorry 'e cast that boy loose, an' took up with the younger. Lor', Toby—wot a boy 'e was!"

Toby nodded his head slowly. "Ah!" he ejaculated. "There ain't no up-settin' about me, or about you, ole gal; we knows ourselves for ordinary folk. But that boy moved, and talked, and 'eld 'issself like a gen'leman."

"That 'e did!" replied Betty, with a vigorous nod. "Lor', Toby—if 'e'd 'ave bin at the 'All—we'd 'ave 'ad no talks about pore ruined gals; no policemen in the 'ouse—no 'untin' an' dodgin' an' 'idin' like this. God knows 'ow it's all goin' to end, Toby."

The house had been shut, so far as its public capacity was concerned, for some time. Knowing, however, that the Inspector must presently make his appearance, and that, in any case, his bed was reserved for him, Mrs. Siggs and her husband sat on over the fire, each filled with sad thoughts, and ready, from the events of the evening, for anything which could happen.

Presently there came a heavy knock at the front door; Mrs. Siggs, with a hand on her ample bosom, started, and looked appealingly at Toby. That gentleman, rising with a determined countenance, proceeded to the door, and flung it open. Exactly what he was prepared to see, it is impossible to say; but he was certainly not prepared for the sight which met his eyes.

Out of the darkness there staggered into the place a solitary figure—that of Inspector Tokely. His hat was gone—one side of his face was grazed and bleeding; he was covered with mud and water almost from head to foot; and his coat was torn right across one shoulder. Gasping and weary, he shook a fist in the face of the astonished Toby Siggs, and snapped out his wrath at that innocent man.

"You scoundrel!" he shouted—"You infernal villain! This is all a plot—a conspiracy—you know it is! I'm lured out of this place, and go racing and chasing across country—where there are no street lamps as there ought to be, and no constables to whistle for. I bark my face against a tree—put there on purpose, I've no doubt, for me to run my head against; I fall into a ditch, which ought to have been drained long ago; I lose my hat, which cost nine-and-sixpence; I tear my coat on a barbed wire fence, which ought never to have been put up. And—to crown it all—I lose my prisoner!"

Betty Siggs, who had come to the door of the little parlour, suddenly clapped her hands and cried out—with an exclamation of so much relief, that the Inspector turned savagely upon her.

“Yes, Ma’am—laugh—giggle—clap your hands—scream with joy, Ma’am! I like it—it does me good! How will *you* like it, when you appear in the dock—the dock, Ma’am!—on a charge of aiding and abetting a prisoner, to escape? What about windows covered with curtains—”

“What would you ‘ave ‘em covered with?” retorted Betty, with a laugh—“wall paper?”

“Never mind, Ma’am—never mind,” retorted Tokely, viciously. “At the present moment, Ma’am, I will go to bed. The Law, Ma’am, can wait. Prepare yourself, Ma’am, for the dock—for the dock, I say!”

With these words, and utterly scornful of Betty Siggs’s peals of laughter, the Inspector made his way upstairs to his chamber—leaving a trail of muddy water to mark his passage.

“That chap’s done me good!” exclaimed Betty, wiping her eyes, and turning to Toby, who was staring in ludicrous amazement after Tokely. “I just wanted summink to stir me up—I did—an’ that chap’s done it!”

“You take care, ole gal, that ‘e don’t stir *you* up,” retorted Toby, shaking his head. “The Law ‘as got a ‘eap be’ind it—an’ you ain’t got the figger to be redooced by skilly, nor the fingers for oakum-pickin’. An’, mark my words, that’s what you’ll come to, ole gal, if you mocks at the Law!”

Betty Siggs, however, was in too good a humour to heed any such warning; she gaily locked up the house, extinguished the lights and pushed Toby upstairs to bed. “Blow the Law!” she exclaimed, kissing him—“You an’ me won’t sleep the less sound, because the Law ‘as got its face scratched, and lost its ‘at—will we, Toby?”

Nevertheless, Betty’s prediction proved to be, so far as she was concerned, a false one; sleep refused to come to her, no matter how she wooed it. Living, as she always had done, a good brisk hard-working blameless life, with a conscience as clear as her own healthy skin, Betty had known nothing of the terrors of insomnia; yet to-night, she lay blinking at the stars peeping in through the uncurtained window, thinking of many things—thinking most of all, perhaps, of the unhappy man flying for his life, hiding in ditches and under hedges, and trembling at every sound. Betty’s tender heart melted a little when she thought of him, and she sadly cried herself into a state of quiet exhaustion, and so fell into a troubled sleep.

And in that sleep she dreamed a dream. She was back again, in the old days, in Australia, at Tallapoona Farm—the farm which had never paid, and from which that bright-faced boy Philip had wandered out one morning, never to return. Yet the curious part of Betty’s dream was this; that, although the sights and sounds beyond the windows were as she had known them over a quarter of a century ago, the house bore a curious resemblance to the Chater Arms; indeed, faces familiar to her later days in Bamberton passed to and fro before the windows, and the slow Bamberton drawl was in her ears.

But, in her dream, night came swiftly on, and the place was in darkness. She thought she stood again in the little parlour alone; and, drawing back the curtain from before the window, looked out upon the sandy bridle-tracks, and wild vegetation which fringed the denser growth beyond. Suddenly, out of this, and coming straight to the window, she saw the child, just as she had known him eighteen long years before. So vivid was the dream, and so clearly did she see his face, and recognise it, that—waking with a cry upon her lips—she found herself out of bed, and standing on the floor, in the faint light of the stars.

Betty Siggs was more troubled than ever. She looked round the room, as though half expecting to see her dream realised; rubbed her eyes, and began to tremble a little. Toby’s regular breathing reassured her somewhat; but still she felt uneasy. The window at which she had seen the face of the man that night, in reality, and the dream-face of the child, haunted her; she felt that she must go to it—must assure herself that there was nothing on the other side of it.

She threw a long cloak round her, noiselessly lit a candle, and crept out of the room. There was no sound anywhere, save the quick patter of her own feet on the stairs, and the rapid scurry of a mouse flying from the light. Betty reached the parlour, set down her candle, and faced the window, over which the curtain had been drawn again.

Now, under all the circumstances, it is probable that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have hesitated, at that hour, to draw back that curtain; and the hundredth would have done it—if at all—out of sheer bravado. But the curious thing was, that Betty had no fear of it at all; so completely was she dominated by her dream, and so much did she seem to be dreaming still, that she walked up to the curtain, and softly drew it aside.

Nor did she think it strange, under the circumstances, that there was a face upon the other side; for, although she believed she looked upon Dandy Chater, somehow the dream face had got mixed up with it; the dream-eyes of the child she believed dead smiled at her, out of the face of the man. Still keeping her eyes upon the window, she slipped along to the door and softly drew the bolt, and opened it; and then—for no known reason, and yet for some reason which seemed strong within her—began to tremble very much, as though she faced something uncanny.

A figure moved towards the door, slipped into the room, and took her in his arms. Not Dandy Chater—not the man with a price on his head, and blood on his cruel hands—not the man whose name was a by-word and a reproach in all that countryside; but her boy—her dear lad, back from his grave thousands of miles away! You couldn’t have tried to deceive old Betty Siggs at that moment; she knew that no other arms could hold her like that.

Then, when he called her—as he had done all those long years before—“little mother”—when he whispered, did she remember Tallapoona Farm, and the mare with the rat-tail, and Peter the sheep-dog—and a dozen other things that would have stamped him as her boy, if nothing else could have done; old Betty woke from her dream, and burst into a flood of tears, and laid her old grey head down on his shoulder.

Perhaps it was well that Toby was sleeping soundly above. For, if *he* had happened to dream, and had wandered, in his night apparel, down to that same parlour, he would have been very properly scandalised. For here was the supposed Dandy Chater, sitting near the table, with Betty Siggs—(hugging him mighty tight round the neck)—on his knee—the while he rapidly sketched out all that happened in those eighteen years.

“Ah—little mother—little mother!” he said, drawing her face down, that he might kiss it—“You didn’t know to whom you were talking, when I strolled in here the other day, and you read me a lecture on the sins of Dandy Chater. It’s been a long time, little mother; picked up, more dead than alive, by an exploring party in the Bush; taken with them miles into the interior; then more miles, by a party bound for the West, with whom they came in contact. Then, five or six years of life with a dear old couple, who had no chicks of their own, and were fond of the friendless boy thrown on their hands. Then, when I could, I went back to Tallapoona—only to find that you had gone to England—no one exactly knew where.”

“An’ you kep’ a thought of me all those years—did you, Phil?” whispered the old woman, proudly. 182

“Yes—and came back to you as soon as I could. At least—not to you, because I didn’t know where you were. But I remembered the story you had told me; and I knew I had the right to the place which had been my father’s. But I would not have turned out my brother; my idea was that we might live together peaceably, sharing what there was. But he is dead.”

She looked round at him, with a startled face; and he realised, in a moment, that he had given her the clue to the whole mystery. Therefore, with much pains and many pauses to allow her to fully digest the extraordinary story, he told her of the whole business; of his arrival in England—of his discovery of the strange likeness between himself and the real Dandy Chater; and of his determination, on discovering that his brother was dead, to trade upon it. Of his certainty that his brother had been murdered; and of the impossibility of fixing the crime upon any one’s shoulders.

But Betty Siggs saw only with the limited vision of love; knew only that her boy was with her again, and that he was innocent of the crime she had unconsciously laid to his charge.

“Lor’—this’ll be news for Toby!” she cried; “this’ll be something to laugh at in the village; that they’ve taken my boy for Dandy Chater, and called him names, and ‘unted ‘im with perlice and sich like—”

“Stop—stop!” he cried, hurriedly. “Not a word of this to a soul, little mother—not a word. Don’t you see the position in which I stand? My brother is dead; I have upon me, at the present moment, his clothes, his papers—his valuables. Good God, little mother—I’ve traded on his name, and on his appearance; I’m mixed up in I know not what shady things concerning him. Turn to any living soul about here to-night—save yourself—and tell my story. They will laugh you to scorn; will deride your boy, who’s come back from the grave. Don’t you see that their first question would naturally be—‘If you are not Dandy Chater—you who wear his clothes, and use his name, and hide by night, because of his sins—if you are not the man, where is he?’ And, Heaven help me—what am I to answer them?” 183

Betty Siggs seemed altogether nonplussed, and could only shake her head. Philip, with his arm about her, did his best to cheer her up again.

“Come—you mustn’t be down-hearted; I’ll pull through, somehow or other,” he said. “But, for the time, I must keep out of the way. Every day I’m getting nearer to the truth about my brother’s death; every day I seem to see my way more clearly. But I don’t want to be accused of his murder—for they might say, with perfect justice, that I murdered him, the better to take his place. No—I want to track down the real man; when that time comes, I’ll call on you to speak. Until then, you must be silent as the grave.”

“I can’t—I can’t!” cried Betty Siggs. “Is my dear boy to come back to me, after all these years—and am I to see ‘im ‘unted an’ drove like this ‘ere, by a mere common Tokely—an’ say nothink? Not me!” Betty Siggs folded her arms, and nodded her head with much determination. 184

“Little mother—little mother!” he exclaimed—“do you want to ruin me? Do you want to undo all that I have tried so hard to bring about? Shall I tell you something more?—something to be hidden deep in that good heart of yours, and never breathed to any one? Betty—you don’t mind my calling you Betty—do you?—have you ever been in love?”

“P’raps you’d like to ask Toby, as is a snorin’ ‘is ‘ead off upstairs this very minute,” retorted Mrs. Siggs, with a very becoming blush. “In love, indeed!”

“Well then, you will understand my difficulty. *I’m* in love, little mother—and with the sweetest girl in all the world. But even in that, my ill-luck dogs me; for she believes that her lover is Dandy Chater, whom she has known for years; if she once heard that she had whispered her words of love and tenderness and sympathy to a stranger—do you think that she would look at me again? Little mother—it’s the maddest thing in the world; because, if she has any regard for me as Dandy Chater, she knows me for everything that’s bad and vile—food only for the common hangman; while, on the other hand, as Philip Chater I am a stranger, and farther from her than ever. In any case, it is hopeless; yet, knowing that whatever sympathy she has is given to Dandy Chater, I’ll be Dandy Chater to the end—whatever that end may be. And even you, little mother, shall not change that 185

purpose. So don't talk about it."

She recognised—however unwillingly—that what he said was true; although she cried a little—partly for love of him, partly in terror at his danger—she yet was comforted by the feeling that all the sad years of mourning were swept away, and that the boy she had reared and loved had fulfilled her most sanguine expectations and had grown to the manhood she had pictured for him.

He got up, and took her tenderly in his arms again, to say good-bye. "It won't be long, little mother," he said, "before I come again to you, and take my place in my father's home. But, for the present, I want you to swear to me—to swear to me on something you love well—that you will not betray my secret. Betty—for the love of your boy—swear to me that you will not betray me—will not take from me the love of the woman who is more to me than anything else in the wide world. Swear to me!"

With tears in her honest old eyes, she drew his head down, and kissed him. "I'll swear to you, Phil," she said—"by that!"

He ran out into the darkness, and left her standing, in the light of the candle, in the little parlour.

THE SHADY 'UN AS A MORAL CHARACTER

It must be confessed that Mr. Ogledon—better known, in some shady circles, as “The Count”—was in an awkward situation. For a whole week, he had secretly congratulated himself on the fact that his unfortunate cousin Dandy Chater was safely out of the way; moreover, he had carefully rehearsed the part he was to play, when first told of Dandy’s disappearance; had decided how best to show his pain and indignation, and his determination to hunt down the mystery, and find the murderer. In a word, he had carefully arranged so that no possible suspicion should fall upon himself; and now he discovered—to his consternation—that all these precautions were unnecessary, and that some ghastly replica of the murdered man had taken his place, and was accepted, by all and sundry as the genuine man. It must be said at once, that Ogledon, having no knowledge of the real story, and goaded by his own guilty conscience, found no solution in his mind of the mystery in any practical form. He saw, in this creature who had sprung up in the likeness of the man whose life had been brutally beaten out of him, only something horrible and intangible, come straight from the Land of Shadows, to mock at him, and drive him to distraction. If, on that lonely river bank, at the dead of night, the victim he had struck down lifeless had suddenly risen up in full vigour, unharmed and smiling, the murderer could not have been more appalled than he was by this quiet acceptance, by every one, of the figure which had stared through the window at him from the terrace of Chater Hall. Never for an instant suspecting the presence of the second man, that solution of the mystery did not occur to him; he saw in this Dandy Chater, risen from the grave, only his own embodied conscience, come to haunt and terrify him.

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He remained that night in the dining-room with the Doctor; fearing to go to bed, or to be left alone for a moment. And, as the Doctor, whenever he got the opportunity, applied himself assiduously to the consumption of neat brandy, Mr. Ogledon as the time drew on towards morning, found himself pretty fully occupied in shaking his companion, and keeping him awake.

But day had its terrors, too; for the first person who entered the room made a casual and innocent enquiry concerning “Master Dandy,” and when he might be expected. Ogledon, dismissing this man with an oath, turned to the Doctor.

“Cripps,—he shook the little man, for perhaps the hundredth time, the better to impress his meaning upon him—“Cripps—I’m going to make a bolt for it. I must get away, for a time, until this thing has blown over, and been forgotten. I shall go mad, if I stay here—Well—what do *you* want?”

This last was addressed to a servant, who had entered the room. The man informed him that a Mr. Tokely—connected, he believed, with the police—wished to see him.

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Ogledon grasped the back of a chair, and turned a ghastly face towards Cripps. Telling the man to show the visitor in, he turned to Cripps, when they were alone together again, and spoke in a frightened hurried whisper.

“Stand by me, Cripps—stand by me, and back me up,” he said. “Ask what you will of me afterwards—only stand by me now.”

Dr. Cripps had the greatest possible difficulty, in his then condition, to stand by himself; but he feebly murmured his intention to shed his blood for his friend. And at that moment Tokely came in.

Now, in the stress of more personal matters, Ogledon had paid but little attention to the disjointed remarks of Mrs. Dolman, concerning the murder in the wood; and the subject had, by this time, gone clean out of his mind. Indeed, but one subject—a deadly fear for his own safety—occupied his mind at this time; so that it will readily be understood that the first words uttered by the Inspector were startling in the extreme.

The Inspector was not in the best of tempers, and was in no mood to be trifled with. He came in rapidly, closed the door and advanced towards Ogledon.

“Now, sir,” he began, “I don’t want you to compromise yourself about this matter; but business is business, and the Law is the Law. Touching this matter of Mr. Dandy Chater—this matter of murder —”

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He got no further; as Ogledon, with a cry, turned swiftly, and made towards the door—Tokely turning, too, in his astonishment—Dr. Cripps, dimly and drunkenly realising that his patron was in danger, caught up the nearest weapon, which happened to be a heavy decanter, and, with a shrill scream, hurled himself upon the Inspector, and brought the decanter down with all his force upon that gentleman’s head. The unfortunate officer, with a groan, dropped flat, and lay motionless.

For a moment or two, Ogledon stood staring down at him, scarcely knowing what to do—while Cripps, mightily pleased with his performance, danced all round Tokely’s prostrate form, waving the decanter, and chanting a species of dirge. But, the seriousness of the position dawning rapidly upon Ogledon, he seized Cripps by the arm, wrenched the decanter from his grasp, and buffeted him into a sense of the enormity of his offence.

“You idiot!” he whispered, hoarsely—“a pretty thing you’ve done now. I might have stood and braved the thing out; there’s no proof against me—and suspicions are useless. But now, after this, there’s nothing for it but to make a bolt of it!—I suppose it’s my own fault, for having anything to do with a drunken little worm like yourself. Quick!—there’s no time to be lost; we must clear out of this. Come!”

Going to the door, he listened cautiously for a few moments, and then swiftly opened it. There was no one in sight, and he darted across the hall, and caught up his own and the Doctor's hats and coats, and went back noiselessly. Tokely still lay without movement; and Ogledon dragged Cripps into his coat, and crammed his shabby hat on his head; put on his own outdoor things, and prepared to leave the place.

"Now, attend to me," he said to Cripps. "I shall lock this door on the inside, and take the key with me; we'll go through this window on to the terrace. If this fellow ever wakes again—of which I am extremely doubtful—it won't be for an hour or so; and that will give us a fair start. Now—come quietly. This has been a devilish unlucky night, and it promises to be an unlucky day. I thought myself so safe; I don't like the turn things have taken at all."

Strolling quietly, until they were out of sight of the windows of the house, the two got clear away—Ogledon keeping a tight grip of the arm of his swaying companion. Indeed, it is possible that, before many hours had elapsed, the little man deeply regretted the part he had played in the recent adventure; for Ogledon walked him on, without mercy, mile after mile, and without paying the slightest attention to his many piteous entreaties to be allowed to pause at seductive-looking public-houses, for rest and refreshment. Later in the day, they came to a small station, within easy distance of London; and—dusty, weary, foot-sore, and ill-tempered, Cripps was glad to get into the corner of a third-class railway-carriage, and fall asleep.

Arrived at the terminus, Ogledon coolly announced to his companion that they must part. "I shall drive across London—get some dinner—and catch the night express for the Continent. You will not, in all probability, hear from me for some time. Good-bye!"

"But what—what is to become of me?" asked the little man, in dismay.

"I'm sure I don't know—and I'm equally sure I don't care," responded Ogledon. "You've got yourself and me into this trouble; I'm going to get out of it—you had better do the same."

"But I've no money," said Cripps, appealingly.

"Ah—you should have thought of that before knocking policemen on the head with decanters. If you will be so giddy and youthful and frolicsome, you must take the consequences. Good-bye again; I hope they won't catch you!" He turned and made his way out of the station; Cripps saw him jump into a cab, and disappear in the press of traffic in the streets.

Meantime, another traveller—a fugitive like himself—had set his face in the same direction; with no settled purpose in his mind, save to hide, until such time as he could formulate a plan of action. Not daring to trust to the railway, lest his description should have been telegraphed, and men should be on the lookout for him, Philip Chater had started off to walk to London. Coming, long after the sun was up, into a straggling suburb, which yet had some faint touches of the country left upon it, he sat down, outside a small public-house, on a bench—ordered some bread and cheese and ale—and ate and drank ravenously.

"Well," he muttered to himself, with a little laugh—"yesterday was a busy day. We start with a burglary, and with the fact that Arthur Barnshaw has discovered me in a forgery, and—so he believes—in an attempt to steal his sister's diamond necklace. Compared with what has gone before, these things are mere trifles."

He laughed again, took a pull at his beer, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Let me see—what happened after that? Oh, to be sure; I went round, to try and have a word with old Betty; I hated the thought that she—dear little mother of the old days—should think so badly of me. I felt that I could trust her to keep my secret, if necessary. Then, after waiting about for a long time, that girl—(Clara—Harry called her)—came out, to tell me that the strange man I had seen through the window was from London, and probably held a warrant for my arrest. And then that jealous idiot Harry, must jump in, and come scouring over the country after me with the policeman in tow. Well, I got away that time at all events."

He sat for some time, with a musing smile upon his face, stirring the dust at his feet with the toe of his boot. At the moment, he had clean forgotten the danger which threatened him, or the necessity for further flight.

"Dear little mother!" he whispered—"how glad she was to see me; how glad to know that her boy had come back again. I'm glad I went back to the place, after the policeman gave up the chase as hopeless. Heigho—I suppose I must be moving—Hullo—what the devil do you want?"

Some one had stopped before him—some one with remarkably old and broken boots. Raising his eyes rapidly upwards to the face of the owner of the boots, Philip Chater gave a start of surprise and dismay. The Shady 'un—looking a little more disreputable than usual—stood before him.

Going rapidly over in his mind the events of the past few days, Philip Chater tried to discover, in the few moments the Shady 'un stood silently regarding him, whether or not he was to look upon that interesting gentleman as a friend, or as a foe. Remembering the two encounters with Captain Peter Quist—the scene in the upper room at "The Three Watermen"—and the unwarrantable liberty taken with the Shady 'un's headgear on that occasion, for the extinguishing of the light—Philip decided that the man had reason to be resentful. Accordingly, he waited for an attack—verbal or otherwise.

But the Shady 'un—for some reason of his own—was disposed to be friendly; feeling, perhaps, a certain warming of his heart towards one in misfortune—a brother in criminality, as it were—he turned a smiling face towards Philip Chater, and held out his hand.

"This 'ere is the 'and of a pal—an 'umble pal, if yer like—but still a pal. Strike me pink!" exclaimed

the Shady 'un, in a sort of hoarse whisper—"but w'en it comes ter bread and cheese fer swells like Dandy—wot are we a comin' to; I would arks"—he flung out one grimy hand, in an appeal to the Universe—"I would arks—wot are we bloomin' well comin' to?"

"Yes—it looks bad—doesn't it?" replied Philip, still with a wary eye upon the other. "But one must take what the gods send—eh?"

"Well—they sends me a dry throat, an' nuffink to wet it with," said the Shady 'un, dismally eyeing the beer which stood on the bench beside Philip, with a thirsty tongue rolling round his lips.

"Well—I dare say we can remedy that," responded Philip. "Go inside, and get what you want, and bring it out here; I should like to talk to you."

The Shady 'un immediately vanished through the doorway, and was heard inside, explaining that his "guv'nor" would pay "the damage." In a few moments, he emerged, bearing a tankard, and some bread and cheese; seated himself on the bench, and fell to with an appetite.

He disposed of his breakfast—if one may so describe it—at an astonishing rate; wiped his pocket-knife on his leg; and looked round, with a smirk which was probably intended as an expression of gratitude, at Philip.

"Tork away, guv'nor," he said, with a glance towards the open door of the house.

"First," said Philip—"tell me how you come to be here."

"They took me, at the last moment, for that 'ere little job at Bamberton—the job of the di'monds. You was in that, Dandy—wasn't yer?"

"Oh yes—I was in it," replied Philip. "So I suppose that you—like myself—are making your way towards London?"

The other nodded. "The word was passed for us to scatter; an' I've bin a scatterin' all the bloomin' night—I 'ave. I must 'ave bin close on yer 'eels most of the time, Dandy."

There was a long and somewhat awkward silence between the two. Philip was debating in his mind as to how much to tell the Shady 'un, and how much to leave unsaid. The Shady 'un, for his part, having heard gathering rumours of that business in the wood, eyed his companion somewhat stealthily, and worked out a plan of action in his own fertile brain. He broke silence at last, by coming at the matter in what he thought a highly diplomatic manner.

"Beastly noosance—gels," he said—staring hard before him.

"What do you mean?" asked Philip, glancing at him in some perplexity.

The Shady 'un drew a deep breath, and shook his head. "There you go!" he exclaimed, with considerable disgust. "No confidence—no trust—no confidin' spirit about yer! Didn't I say, a week ago, as you might come ter the Shady 'un, wiv a open 'eart an' 'and; that 'e was the friend, if ever the Count should fail yer! Strike me pink!" cried the Shady 'un, with much earnestness—"did I say them words—or did I not?"

"I believe you said something of the kind," replied Philip, after a moment's pause.

"Course I did," said the Shady 'un, energetically. "An' wot I said I sticks to. They calls me the Shady 'un; but I was c'ristened 'Shadrach—an' 'ad a faver of the name of Nottidge. The Shady 'un may not be all as 'e should be; but Shadrach Nottidge is a pal, an' a friend. Dandy, my boy—there's 'emp-seed sowed for you—an' well you knows it."

Philip glanced round at him quickly, but said nothing. The Shady 'un drank some beer slowly, looking over the top of the tankard, and winked one eye with much solemnity. Setting down the beer, he ventured to lay one hand on Philip's arm. "Yer ain't treated me quite fair, Dandy—but I bears no malice," he said, in the same hoarse whisper as before. "I 'ave bin chivvied by a pal o' yourn—I 'ave bin knocked into a shop by that same pal—I 'ave 'ad a many things done wot ain't strictly on the square. But I bears no malice, an' I'm ready to 'elp yer."

There seemed so much sincerity about the man, and Philip was so desperately in need of assistance at that time, that he resolved to confide in him. After all, he thought, the man knew the worst, and knew in how many other shady transactions Dandy Chater had been mixed up; to confirm his friendship would perhaps, after all, be a matter of policy.

"Well, then—understand this," he said abruptly—"I'm flying for my life. There's a warrant out against me for murder—"

The Shady 'un nodded comfortably. "I know—I know," he said; "young gel—very much in the way—you 'its 'er a clump—say by axerdent. She don't like it—an' just to spite yer—goes dead. Lor'—that ain't nuffink; might 'appen to a man any day. But I suppose the splits is out—an' Dandy must make 'isself scarce?"

"Yes—that's about it," replied Philip.

The Shady 'un got up, and shook himself, with an air of resolution. "It's a lucky fing I came acrost yer so 'andy," he said. "You'd 'ave got nabbed in no time. The Shady 'un's yer pal; stick to 'im—an' all will be well."

In his desperate extremity, Philip made up his mind to trust the man. By strange courts and alleys, and by unfrequented thoroughfares, they came at last to a wretched lodging, in the neighbourhood of the Borough—a lodging which appeared to be the private retreat of the Shady 'un in his hours of leisure. There, Philip Chater, utterly worn out, was glad to fling himself on a wretched bed, and fall asleep instantly.

For some minutes after he had begun to slumber, the other man stood looking down upon him, with an evil smile crossing his face; he even shook his fist at him once—bringing it so near to the sleeper's head, that it was a matter for wonder that he did not actually hit him.

"This is a good chance fer me—this 'ere," whispered the Shady 'un to himself. "Nice chap you are—to give yerself airs, an' git yer pals to bang me about—ain't yer? This little bit of business may stand me in all right, if I gets into trouble on me own. Yes—Dandy—I'll make sure of you, right away!"

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The Shady 'un—after assuring himself that Philip was sleeping heavily—left the place, and bent his steps in a direction they would not willingly have taken on any other occasion—to a police-station. Within a very little time, messages had flashed to and fro upon the wires; questions had been asked and answered; and a silent and taciturn sergeant, accompanied by a couple of constables, went back with the Shady 'un to his lodging.

Philip, waking from an uneasy sleep, saw the grim faces—the blue coats—the helmets of the Law; and knew that the game was up. The Shady 'un—after being quite sure that he was secured—drew near.

"These gents know me—an' they knows as 'ow I've 'ad my little bit of trouble afore to-day. But my 'ands—look at 'em, gents, I beg of yer—my 'ands is free from blood—an' sich-like wickedness. Gents—if ever the time should come w'en, for dooty's sake, you should 'ave to be 'ard on me—you'll remember this in my favour—won't yer?"

"Oh yes—we'll remember it," responded the taciturn sergeant. "Come, Mr. Dandy Chater—we are quite ready."

Late that night, Bamberton was stirred to its depths again, by the news that Mr. Dandy Chater was in close custody in the lock-up, with a special draft of constables to keep watch over him.

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WHO KILLED THIS WOMAN?

Bamberton was taking grim holiday. Bamberton the sleepy—with nothing to stir it, from one dreary year's end to the other, treading its dull respectable round, knowing exactly who married who, and how John This, or James That, got on with their respective wives, with the certainty of the dull little clock in the Chater Arms—had suddenly awakened to find itself notorious, and its name in big print in the great London papers. Moreover, had not Bamberton, the newly-awakened, already had pictures of its High Street (with an impossible man, in a smock-frock, leaning on a species of clothes-prop, in the foreground) in the illustrated and evening journals? Had not Bamberton already been photographed, interviewed, stared at, and made public in a hundred different ways. Now, too, had come the day of the inquest; and impossible rumours were already in the air, concerning that same inquest, and the marvellous things which were to be said and done thereat. Scarcely to be wondered at therefore, is it, that Bamberton should be taking grim holiday, and should be flocking to the place where twelve lucky members of its male community had been summoned to give judgment, concerning the doing to death of poor Patience Miller.

At a period long since forgotten, some charitable inhabitant, or other person interested in the welfare of the male and female youth of Bamberton, had had dreams of an Institute; and, with that laudable design in view, had pounced upon the only unoccupied spacious building in the locality, and had endeavoured to transform it into a Hall of semi-dazzling Light. The attempt had been a failure; and the building—which was no other than the old Mill, which stood on the outskirts of the wood—had long since fallen into greater decay than before.

But this place had again come before the public notice, by reason of the fact that the body of the murdered girl had been carried there, after its discovery; and at that place the inquest was to be held. The body had been put in an upper room—a species of loft; the inquest was to be held in the great room of the Mill, where certain iron rings and rotting ropes—part of an abortive attempt at a gymnasium—hung suggestively from the ceiling. And thither all Bamberton bent its steps.

“Whisperings, and murmurings, and the shuffling of many feet—with some glances towards the ceiling, as though curious eyes would pierce through, and see the ghastly thing laid above. At present, only a grave-faced country constable or two, setting chairs in order for the twelve lucky men, the Coroner, and the witnesses; and exercising a little brief authority, in keeping back certain Bambertonites who were pressing forward beyond the limits assigned for the general public. Once or twice, the door of a smaller room opened, and an important-looking little man, with a hard face and a tuft of hair on his chin, came bustling out, with a little sheaf of papers in his hand, to whisper to one or other of the constables. The door of that room proved to be a keen source of attraction to many eyes; for it was whispered that the prisoner waited within.”

After what seemed an interminable length of time, a little gentleman, in a black frock-coat, thrust his way with some impatience through the general public, and made his way to one end of the table set apart in the cleared space. A murmur ran round that this was the Coroner, from the neighbouring county-town; murmurs, also, that he did not quite look the part, inasmuch as that he wore an air of cheerfulness, which seemed almost to suggest that he was about to preside at a wedding, rather than at anything so formidable as an inquest.

A little glancing at his watch by this gentleman; an expostulatory whisper or two on his part to the constables in attendance, and the door of the inner room opened again, and Inspector Tokely came bustling out. One constable—a stranger to Bamberton, and of more importance on that account, produced a list, from which, with a strong provincial accent, he proceeded to call out certain names. Then, more shuffling of feet, and some friendly pushing of bashful jurymen forward, and the twelve ranged themselves sheepishly, with much coughing, round the table, and were duly sworn.

“Be seated, gentlemen, I beg,” said the Coroner, busy with his papers. “Stop one moment, though”—glancing up quickly—“have you viewed the body?”

Several of the jurymen present expressed a decided disinclination to do anything of the kind; and it became apparent that that important ceremony had not been performed.

“Really, Moody,” exclaimed the Coroner—“this is most remiss on your part. This should have been done first of all. We are wasting time—valuable time.”

The repentant Mr. Moody—the strange constable—made some attempt at an apology, and concluded by hurrying the jurymen through another door, where they were heard to go heavily up wooden stairs, and to tramp about a little overhead. In the meantime, the Coroner had a word or two with Inspector Tokely, and glanced once or twice, with a nod, towards the door where the prisoner was supposed to be.

The jurymen coming down again—some of them rather white-faced and wide-eyed—the Coroner abruptly motioned them to their seats, and turned to Tokely as he took his own.

“Inspector, I think we may have Mr. Chater in here now.”

The general public seemed to stir and sway, as though bent by a sudden wind; bending towards each other, and whispering hoarsely, yet keeping their eyes with one accord turned towards that door. Inspector Tokely hurried out, and came back in another moment, glancing over his shoulder through the doorway; immediately following him came Philip Chater, with two constables in close attendance. He looked round for a moment at the murmuring crowd; seemed to seek one face in it,

and to smile as he recognised it. At the same moment, a woman in the crowd burst into violent weeping.

The Coroner rapped the table impatiently with his knuckles. "Any demonstration on the part of any member of the public will necessitate my clearing the room at once," he said, looking sternly about him.

One of the jurymen—no other than old Toby Siggs—rose ponderously in his place. "Askin' yer pardon, Mister," he said, slowly—"I rather think as 'ow that was my ole gel." Then, before the astonished Coroner could interpolate a remark, Toby turned abruptly, and addressed his spouse. "Earty is it, ole gel," he said, in a voice like muffled thunder, for her special hearing—"we'll git 'im off, afore you'd 'ave time to draw 'arf a pint. Bear in mind, ole gel, as 'ow I've got a vote."

"My good sir," interposed the Coroner, hurriedly,—“let me impress upon you that this business must be tried judicially and fairly—with no bias. Understand that clearly."

Toby nodded his head with much gravity. "Sich are my intentions, Mister," he said. "So fire away as 'ard as you like. An' Gawd 'elp the winner!" With which pious exclamation, Toby Siggs sat down perfectly satisfied with himself.

And now the Coroner—in a quick, bustling fashion, as though he were in a hurry, and should be glad to get so unimportant a matter off his hands—began to inform the jury of what their clear duty was, and how rapidly they might set about it. The body of this young girl, gentlemen, had been found in the adjacent wood. She was stabbed very near a vital part, and had undoubtedly, under considerable pain, and for a period perhaps of half-an-hour, slowly bled to death. They would be told—by the medical gentleman then present—who had made a most careful post-mortem examination of the body—that the wound could not have been self-inflicted. Such being the case, gentlemen, it devolved upon them to discover in what fashion her death had been caused; and here he would remind them that they must be guided entirely by circumstantial evidence. A man—a gentleman of good position—appeared before them that day, in a most unenviable situation. It was not for him, gentlemen, to tell them of their duty, or to lead them to imagine that any guilt attached to the man they saw before them; all that they must judge for themselves. But they would be confronted with witnesses—most unwilling witnesses—who would tell them of the intimacy which had undoubtedly existed between this man and the murdered girl; they would be told, gentlemen, by a witness from the railway station, of the appearance of this man, in a great state of excitement and hurry, at the station, in time—barely in time, gentlemen, to catch the last train to London. This, too, on the very night of the murder, and within a very short time of the hour at which, according to the medical testimony they would hear, this unfortunate young woman must have been struck down.

Here the Coroner stopped to clear his throat, and to glance at Philip Chater—as though to assure that unfortunate man that he was quite prepared to put a rope round his neck within the next few minutes, and had already got it half spun.

The gentlemen of the jury, who surely knew their duties, would be told how this man, deserting his home, had fled to London; how he had come back, in the dead of night, and had been seen about the village; how a most intelligent officer—a gentleman from Scotland Yard, gentlemen—had endeavoured to capture him; how he had again fled to London. They would be told, by a former associate of this man—now very repentant of his connection with him—of a sort of semi-confession made by this man to him. More than all, they would hear that a spade had been discovered near the body, which had evidently been used in a hurried attempt to dig a grave for the murdered girl (the crowd swayed again, like an angry sea and one woman shrieked out something unintelligible against the man who stood so calmly through it all)—and that spade would be traced as having come from the residence of the man now before them. While admitting, gentlemen, that all this evidence was purely circumstantial, the Coroner must beg them not to cast it lightly aside on that account, but to hear the witnesses with patience. And so sat down, having spun his rope to a tolerable length and strength.

Marshaled by Tokely, the first witnesses were already shuffling to their places, when an interruption came from among the crowd; and a young man thrust himself forward, and made straight for the Coroner. He was a bright-faced fellow, with a cool and gentlemanly bearing, and he gave a quick nod to Philip as he pressed forward.

"One moment, Mr. Coroner," he said. "Mr. Chater here is an old friend of mine—knew him at Oxford. I'm a barrister; and I claim the right to represent Mr. Chater at these proceedings. I should like to point out to you, Mr. Coroner"—still with the same engaging frankness, and the same cheery smile—"that my friend is placed in a very awkward position, and has against him, in charge of the case, a very able representative of the law"—a bow here for the gratified Inspector—"from Scotland Yard. I merely propose to watch the case on behalf of my friend, and to put such questions as I may deem necessary, and as you, Mr. Coroner, may see fit, in the exercise of a wise discretion, to allow." Here the young gentleman bowed all round again, with another cheery smile, and sat down near the Coroner, after having made a decidedly good impression.

Philip Chater broke the silence which seemed to hang so heavily about him, and addressed the Coroner. "I am greatly obliged," he said, "for my friend's kindly offer; but I would rather decline it. Whatever case there is against me must go on its merits; I desire nothing more."

Before the Coroner, or any one else, could speak, the young gentleman came darting out of his chair, and had Philip by the button-hole—drawing him aside a little, and impressing his points upon him in an eager whisper.

"Now, my dear boy," he said, with the same frankness as before—"don't you be foolish. Frankly—I

believe you to be innocent; but these beggars don't—and you'll get yourself into a devil of a hole, and give yourself away most gloriously, if you try to conduct the case yourself. This chap from Scotland Yard is an ass—but he's vindictive; the Coroner is in a hurry, and is dead against you. On the other hand—have the goodness to consider my position. This is my first chance—absolutely my first. I've read up the case, day by day, and I know it by heart; I may do you a lot of good—and I shall make my own fortune. To-morrow morning in all the newspapers—Andrew Banks—rising young barrister—badgered the Coroner—turned the witnesses inside out—played Old Harry with the police; don't you see? Now—all you have to do is to sit quiet, and look virtuous; I'll lay out Mr. Coroner, for the benefit of the yokels, in a brace of shakes."

He was gone again, back to his place at the table, before Philip Chater had even time to thank him, or to remonstrate further; and the real business of the inquest began. In the first place, appeared the two countrymen who had found the body; and who contradicted each other in minor points of detail, and were hopelessly confused by that rising young barrister Mr. Andrew Banks—so much so, that, at the end of five minutes, they were half disposed to believe that the one had committed the murder, and the other made an attempt to hide the body. And so sat down, greatly confused. 208

Next came Betty Siggs—making a deeper impression than she would willingly have done against the man who stood watching her. For, after a question or two, old Betty turned suddenly to that quiet figure, and stretched out her hands, and appealed to him, in a voice shaken by sobs.

"For God's sake—let me speak; let me tell what I know," she said; and, though she spoke in a whisper, the silence about her was so deep and solemn that the lightest breath of that whisper was heard. "For the sake of the old days—let me say what you and I alone know—let me—my dear—my dear!"

Unfortunately, it had the very opposite effect to that which Betty intended; for there seemed to be at once established between these two some terrible affinity in the crime, which made it more horrible. Nor did the young barrister improve matters; for, wholly at a loss to understand to what she referred he began to urge her to tell all she knew—even to threaten her with dire penalties, in the event of non-compliance.

But that only made matters worse; she cast one swift look in the direction of Philip, and read in his face that she must be silent; turned on the young and ardent man of law—and defied him.

"Don't you think, young man—as you're agoin' to open my mouth—because you ain't. I loved this poor young gel, as though she'd been a child o' my own; but I swear to you, before God, that the man who stands there knew nothing of it, and is absolutely innocent. Toby—my angel—vote for 'im—if you love me!" 209

Toby answered with a responsive growl, and Mrs. Siggs sat down. Nor would the pleadings of the Coroner—the threats of Tokely—or the suavity of the young barrister move her; she read in the face from which she took her inspiration that she must be silent—and the rack itself would not have moved her.

Came the medical man, who gave his evidence grimly enough, in technical terms which yet sent a shudder through the listening crowd. He had examined the body, and, in answer to a question from the Coroner, gave it as his opinion—and with certainty—that the unfortunate girl, at the time of her death was near the period when she would have given birth to a child; struck a more deadly blow at the prisoner, by describing, in callous medical phraseology, the wound which had been inflicted, and the lingering death which followed. At the end of that evidence, there was not a man nor woman in the place that would not have shrieked "Murderer!" at him, whatever the verdict of the jury might be.

Some little sensation was created by the appearance of Harry Routley, the young servant of Dandy Chater; who—tackled by the Inspector, and keeping his eyes resolutely turned from the man whose life he was swearing away, gave his evidence in little more than monosyllables; but gave it in damning quality enough, even at that. Some greater sensation, too, was caused, by his turning swiftly to the prisoner, in the midst of the questions of the Inspector, and holding out his hands to Philip in an agony of appeal; and then covering his face with them. 210

"Master Dandy—Master Dandy!" he cried—"I swore to you that I would keep the secret—I have broken my word! Master Dandy—I was mad—beside myself—Master Dandy—forgive me!"

It created, if that were possible, a worse impression than ever. In the midst of the murmurs which surged up about them, the quiet voice of Philip was heard.

"It's all right, Harry; you've only done the right thing. The time will come when you will understand better what I mean—when you will have no cause for regret. You need have none now; you have been more loyal and true to me than I deserved; I say it openly, before all here."

Came Inspector Tokely himself, demanding that this man be sent for trial; pointing out this man's desperate attempts to escape; his partial success; and so introducing the last witness—the Shady 'un.

The Shady 'un—giving his name, with much humility, as Shadrach Nottidge—threw himself upon the mercy of the gentlemen present. He was but an 'umble workin' man—led astray by the villainies of Mr. Chater. In a moment of remorse, he had felt that Mr. Chater must be given up; he could not have slept in peace, good gentlemen, while Mr. Chater remained at large. Mr. Chater had told him that he was flying for his life; had begged him (the Shady 'un) to give him shelter. Declining to allow his white hands to be soiled—even by deputy—with blood, he had taken the earliest opportunity of handing Mr. Chater over to the Law. And he hoped it would be remembered in his favour. 211

Mr. Andrew Banks—rising young barrister of the cheery smile—tried his hardest—badgered the Coroner—twitted Inspector Tokely—was sarcastic with the Shady 'un; but all to no purpose. The Coroner very clearly pointed out to the jury their obvious duty in this matter; reminded them that Law and Justice took no cognizance of a man's social position; and generally spun his rope a little stronger. Finally, addressing Philip, begged to know if he cared to make any statement, administering to him, at the same time, the usual legal caution.

“I have nothing to say—except that I am wholly innocent of this murder,” said Philip, quietly.

The rest was a mere matter of form. The jury returned a verdict of Wilful Murder, against Mr. Dandy Chater, of Chater Hall, in the County of Essex; and he was duly committed to take his trial at the coming Sessions at the county-town. Toby Siggs made some faint protest, but was overruled; and the crowd surged out into the spring sunshine, and generally expressed the opinion that Dandy Chater was as good as hanged already.

CLARA FINDS A LODGING

On the morning following that verdict of Wilful Murder, some one was astir very early at the Chater Arms; some one dressed hurriedly, while the dawn was yet breaking; some one crept softly down the stairs—pausing for a moment at one door, and seeming to catch her breath in a sob—and so went cautiously out of the house.

It was Clara Siggs. But not the Clara Siggs of old; not the bright-eyed impudent little beauty, ready for a dozen coquetries—willing to exchange smiling glances with any good-looking lad who passed her. Quite another person was the Clara Siggs who went swiftly down the village street this morning, with a resolute purpose in her black eyes; so much had one night changed her.

She hurried on, for a time, resolutely enough, until she was almost clear of the village. The houses were closed; in one window which she passed, a faint light—burning perhaps in some sick-chamber—seemed to bid scant defiance to the coming day, and crave that the night might be longer. But there was no sign of life anywhere else; the village might have been a place of the dead, for all the life there was about it.

At a certain point on the road, her steady resolution seemed to falter; she hesitated—walked more slowly—and finally stopped altogether; as though working out something in her mind, she made little circles in the dust with one foot, while she stood, looking frowningly at the ground, and biting her red lips. At last the difficulty—whatever it was—seemed to have solved itself; she turned from the road, and struck off by a side path in the direction of the house known as The Cottage.

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What instinct had guided her there, it would be impossible to say; but the object of her search, early as the hour was, was in the garden—sitting on a rustic seat, out of the view of the windows of the house, and with her face hidden on her hands. Hearing the light sweep of the girl's dress on the grass, she rose hurriedly and disclosed the figure of Madge Barnshaw.

For a moment, the two faced each other in silence—the one, vexed and ashamed at being discovered in such an attitude; the other, with something of defiance about her, mixed with a desperate and growing anxiety. In some indefinable fashion, each seemed to know the subject of the other's thoughts, and to be jealous of those thoughts, each in a different way.

But the one woman would have died sooner than acknowledge any emotion or sorrow to the other; the other was proud of her emotion—openly flaunted it, as it were; and would have been glad to think that one man's name was branded upon her forehead almost, that all might read her secret.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Madge, rising to her feet, and confronting the other.

"Dear Heaven!" cried Clara, in a sort of harsh whisper—"can you stand there, and look at me and ask that? Can you know that a man is as good as dying—dying by inches, with every moment that we live—and ask me that?"

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"I—I don't understand," said Madge, in a low voice. "More than all, I cannot see why you are troubling yourself about—"

Clara Siggs had turned away impatiently; she flung round now, and came at the other woman with her hands held clenched close to her sides, and her teeth close clenched also. "You don't understand! You cannot see why I should be troubling about him! I am an inn-keeper's daughter—only a common girl, at the least; you are a great lady. They say you were to marry him; will you cast him away now, when he lies in prison, in shame and misery—and with Death drawing nearer every day? Is your love for him so great, that it is something to be changed by what men say of him?"

Some curious shame—some strange stirring of admiration for this wild untutored child—crept over Madge Barnshaw. She saw, in this girl, something stronger and more purposeful than herself—the wild and desperate courage which might over-ride all obstacles—which might snap fingers at Death itself, for the sake of one man's life. She went nearer to the girl, and held out her hands to her.

"Tell me—help me!" she whispered—"show me what I should do!"

With that direct appeal, all poor Clara's heroism went to the winds; she could only cover her face with her hands, and weep, and shake her head, and declare how helpless she was. She could have met defiance with defiance—pride with pride; but the sudden tenderness of the other woman was too much for her, and broke down at once whatever barrier she had determined to build up between them.

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"Indeed—I don't know—I can't think. I want to help him, if I can; I want to be near him—oh—you needn't think," added Clara, tearfully—"that I am anything to him; I might have thought so once—but I know better now. This trouble has cleared my mind somehow, so that I can see things as they are. If he has been—kind—and nice—to me—it's only as he might be to any one whose face pleased him"—Clara tossed her head a little, despite her tears, and seemed to suggest that she knew the value of her own charms. "With you—well—it's different."

Madge Barnshaw thought bitterly that it might not be so very different, after all; thought of the murdered girl, and bitterly blamed herself because she could not stand aside before all the world, and believe him innocent.

Something of this must have been in the mind of the other girl; looking at Madge steadily, she asked, with some sternness—"You don't believe he did that horrible thing—do you?"

Madge Barnshaw covered her face with her hands, and shuddered. "I don't know—I don't know what to think," she said, in a whisper.

Clara turned swiftly, and began to walk away. She had almost reached the garden gate, when Madge, springing after her, caught her by the arm.

"You're right—and I am a coward, and unworthy of his or any one else's love and confidence. I will believe in him—in his innocence. You make me believe. Tell me—what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Chelmsford," replied Clara, simply. "I want to be near him—I want to feel that I know all that is happening. For me—it will not matter; no one will take any notice of me. I can go where you could not."

"But what will you do at Chelmsford? How will you live?" asked Madge.

Clara smiled bravely, and threw up her head a little higher. "I have a little money—no, thank you"—as the other made a gesture, as if to reach her purse—"I have more than I need—and I shall take a lodging near—near the prison. I came here, because I wanted to know—to know"—she hesitated, and her voice trailed off, and died away.

"Wanted to know—what?"

"To know if there was any—any message you would wish to send to him," replied Clara at last, very stiffly, and with a face of scarlet. "I thought maybe that if I could carry—carry some message from you—you, who have the right to send one—it might cheer him, and lead him to think better of the world, when every one is against him. He may not—how should he?—may not think or care anything for what I may say—but you—"

Madge Barnshaw moved forward quickly, and took the girl in her arms. "What angel of God has put such a thought in your heart?" she whispered. "I shall bless you all my life for coming to me like this—for teaching me, out of your own simple faith and loyalty, some faith and loyalty too. Will you promise to write to me, directly you are settled in your new lodging? Will you promise to write often to me—to claim from me anything you may want?"

After a little further hesitation, Clara Siggs promised that she would communicate with her new friend frequently. And then Madge, with her arms still about the girl, whispered her message.

"Tell him—if you will," she said—"that I love him, and believe in his innocence—that I will believe in that—and in him—until he tells me, with his own lips, that he is guilty!"

Clara promised that the message should be delivered; and, with a parting embrace the two separated—Clara to set forth on her journey; Madge to pace the garden wearily, and, now that she was alone again, with a growing despair.

Having only some five miles to traverse, before coming into the picturesque old town of Chelmsford, Clara Siggs first trod its streets just as the shops were beginning to set forth their wares for the day, and its pavements to echo with the fall of busy feet. Rendered timid by the size of the place, and fearful of attracting attention, she did not care to ask her way to the jail, but wandered about, until the frowning walls of the building looked down upon her. Various notices were posted on a door, setting forth the date of the next assizes, together with other information—only part of which she grasped, in her anxiety, and in the many tumultuous thoughts which stirred her, at the remembrance of how near she was to the place where the man of whom she had come in search lay.

She resolved, for her own comfort and satisfaction, to get a lodging as near to the prison as possible; and, after some little search, came to a decent house in a by-street, in the lower window of which a card announced that a room was to be let. Her hesitating knock at the door was answered promptly, by a tall, thin, angular-looking woman, with very red hair, and a very business-like aspect. She appeared to possess a kindly nature, however, despite her grim appearance; and civilly invited Clara to inspect the room advertised.

"If I wasn't a person as 'as bin put upon by 'er 'usband," she ejaculated, darting a scornful glance in the direction of a door past which they walked—"I wouldn't never demean myself by a takin' a lodger. But 'avin' a man as give me 'is name, an' precious little else—an' whose delight it 'as bin to flaunt it on the main, so to speak—an' who now 'as 'is mind runnin' constant on circuses, an' fat women—(w'ich is nothink else but a throwin' of my figger in my face)—I should be in a better position than I now am, Miss. But Peter Quist won't deceive *me* with 'is circuses—the low Turk—an' so I tells 'im."

They had, by this time, reached the room—a pleasant and airy place, and very simply furnished. Clara would probably have decided to take it, whatever terms might have been asked, when she saw that its one small window looked right on to the prison; but, as a matter of fact, the rent proved to be very small, and the woman, being pleased with the bright face of the girl, asked for no reference.

Perhaps from the fact that she felt most desperately lonely and friendless, in that strange place, Clara determined that she would tell the landlady frankly what her mission was, and ask her advice. Accordingly, with many tears, she told the woman that she had come to Chelmsford, in the hope of seeing or befriending a prisoner—a friend of hers, then awaiting his trial. The woman proved to be genuinely sympathetic, and, after a little cogitation, decided to consult her husband about the matter.

"Mind you," she said, in a voice of caution—"I'm not sayin' but wot Quist is a bit of a fool; salt water do 'ave that effect on the best o' men; it seems to soak through, some'ow and make 'em soft. But 'e's got a 'eart, 'as Quist—an' now an' then, 'e knows wot 'e's about. It ain't often—but we may

'appen to catch 'im at a lucky time."

Clara, willingly consenting to consult this oracle, and inwardly praying that he might have his full wits about him, they adjourned downstairs in search of him. He proved to be an exceedingly amiable looking man, with a heavy fringe of whiskers all round a jolly red face.

The circumstances having been briefly explained by his wife, the man—no other than our old friend Captain Peter Quist—poured himself out, from a stone bottle, what he termed "a toothful"—and proceeded to give the matter weighty consideration.

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"You see, my lass," he said—"w'en the Law 'as once got a 'old on a man, an' clapped 'im under 'atches, as it were—that man 'as got to go through with it, right up to the end. Might I venture for to ask wot your friend is put in irons for?"

"Indeed—he is quite innocent," exclaimed Clara. "But he has been sent to take his trial—oh—I beg that you will not think the worse of him for that—for murder."

The Captain whistled softly, and raised his eyebrows. "An' wot might be the name of this innocent gent?" he asked, after a pause.

"Mr. Chater," replied Clara, in a low voice.

Peter Quist upset his toothful, and nearly overturned Mrs. Quist also, in his excitement; he sprang up, and backed away into a corner of the room. For some moments he stood there, making curious motions with his hands, as though warding off an attack, and looking at Clara uneasily.

"Say it agin," he said at last, in a hoarse whisper. "Wot was the name?"

Clara repeated it; and the Captain gradually came out of his corner, and approached her slowly. "Look 'ere, my lass," he said; "I've 'ad a shock over that there name—an' I'm a bit upset with it. A friend o' mine sailed under that name—an' it proved too much for 'im—or summink did. Leastways—'e's dead. So I don't want nuffink more to do with no Chaters; I'd sooner 'elp a Smith or Jones than a Chater."

Gradually, however, the Captain's uneasiness wore away; he began to take a lively interest in the girl, and in her story; and went out, that very afternoon, to ascertain if it were possible for her to visit the prisoner, and at what hours.

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He returned, with the gratifying intelligence that she might go to the prison on the next morning; and poor Clara slept happily enough that night, with that blessed prospect before her. The Captain, too, was in better spirits than he had been for some time past—a letter having reached him through the post, which seemed to promise a definite solution of his difficulties, in regard to finding a circus at last. The only drawback to it seemed to be, that there were no fat ladies attached to it—although, perhaps, in view of Mrs. Quist, this was not altogether a subject for sorrow.

It was with a trembling heart that Clara presented herself next day at the door which the Captain pointed out to her. But everyone with whom she came in contact seemed willing to help her—even anxious to be of service; and she was passed on, from one to the other, until at last she was directed to the room where he was actually waiting.

"You'd better wait a minute, Miss," said a warder—"there's someone with him."

The door opened at the same moment, and a brisk-looking young gentleman came out, thrusting some papers in his pocket as he did so. Seeing a young girl drawn up timidly against the wall, he stopped—hesitated a moment—and then turned towards her.

"You're young for such a place as this, girl," he said, sharply but kindly. "Are you going to see Chater?"

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"Yes, sir." She was scarcely able to speak for nervousness.

The young man came nearer, and whispered exultantly, "Splendid case—they're proud of it even here. And I think we shall pull him out of it—I do, indeed."

"Oh—I am so glad to hear you say so, sir," said the girl, gratefully.

"Yes—I think he's all right; I shall try everything. The only difficulty is that he's so close about it that I can get nothing out of him. But—won't he make a lovely prisoner; we shan't be able to get into Court for the petticoats!"

The young man walked briskly away, and Clara passed into the room. The warder who had brought her to the door, and who had stood aside, while the young barrister spoke, opened the door, and followed her in. Another warder, who had been lounging near a high barred window, glanced at her for a moment; and then she felt her hands grasped by those of Philip Chater.

"My child! How do you come to be here? Are you alone?"

Hurriedly and tearfully, she explained all that had happened; how she had left a note at home, telling them that she was safe, and with friends—and would write more fully at a later time; how she had seen Miss Barnshaw, and how she had a message for him. And, loyal and brave as she had been through everything, her heart seemed to sink deeper and deeper, as she saw the brightness on his face, when he heard what that message was.

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The warders, seeing in these two, as they imagined, a pair of sweethearts, took but little notice of them, beyond keeping a sharp eye upon them. In reply to Philip's eager questions, Clara told him of the lodging she had taken, and mentioned the name of her landlady—and of the Captain, husband of that landlady.

"There is a Providence in this," whispered Philip, eagerly. He appeared to be deep in thought for a moment, and then turned swiftly to the girl. "I know this man Quist—a good and honest man, with whom you are safe. Say nothing to him about me, or about my knowledge of him. Now, don't start or cry out—come closer to me, and listen to what I say. I shall be out of this—I *must*—within a few hours. My defence—my life—everything depends on that—and on myself. There is some one I must find; to stay here means death—within a given time."

"Time's up!" exclaimed one warder, shaking his keys.

"An instant I beg." He turned again to the girl. "If you could loiter near the prison—at the back of it, so far as I can discover,—each night—can you?"

There was no time for anything more; the girl nodded quickly, and was hurried away. But she went home to her lodging with a heart beating more heavily even than before.

A CHASE IN THE DARK

Not daring to say a word in explanation to the Captain or Mrs. Quist, Clara went out that night, when darkness had fallen, and waited near the prison. Fortunately, it stood in a quiet spot—not much frequented after nightfall; she found a convenient arched doorway, from which she could watch the building unseen.

On the first night, nothing happened; the moon was set high in flying clouds, and the night was very still; now and then, she heard the passing feet of a pedestrian, crossing the end of the street in which she stood; once, a man went along on the opposite side, under the high walls, whistling—but did not see her. Mrs. Quist, having provided her with a key, in her trustfulness of heart, the girl lingered until a very late hour, and until the last footstep had died away. But still there was nothing.

On the second night, with a growing hope, she waited again—wishing, with all the strength of her love, that her eyes might pierce the heavy walls, and discover what the prisoner was doing. She had almost given up hoping for anything, and was preparing to return home to her lodging, when a curious sound broke upon her ear, and she started forward out of the gateway, keenly watchful.

She had heard a quick light thud upon the pavement, and then the rapid feet of some one running. Almost before she had had time to collect her thoughts, or to decide whether to hide again, or show herself, a figure dashed straight towards her, down the street, in the shadow of the wall. Some instinct causing her to spring out, the figure stopped, drawn straight up against the wall, and then slowly crossed towards her. The next moment her hands were in those of Philip Chater.

She had time, before he spoke, to notice that the hands which held hers were cut and bleeding; that he panted heavily, as though after some terrible exertion; and that he was covered with dust and lime-wash, and was hatless.

“Show me the way,” he panted. “Hide me somewhere—quick!”

She hurried on with him, while he crouched in the shadow of the houses, so that her figure might cover him as much as possible. They had scarcely more than a hundred yards to go, before she put her key swiftly in the lock of a door—drew him through, and shut it behind her. Bidding him, in a whisper, wait where he was, in the darkness of the passage, she softly opened the door of a lighted room, and went in.

Now it happened that evening, that Captain Peter Quist was in a great state of excitement. He had completed, that very day, the purchase of an absolutely ideal circus; a circus in full working order, the proprietor of which was only anxious to pass it into the hands of its new owner, and retire into private life. The delighted Captain had discovered that his new property consisted of three or four well-fitted caravans—a few small tents, together with one huge one for the accommodation of his audiences—and some waggons, with the necessary fittings for the concern. Horses—performing and otherwise—there were in abundance; and the Captain had already been assured that the male and female staff was only too ready to accept service under him. And the proprietor, having expressed a desire that Quist should see the show in working order, and be initiated into its mysteries gradually, the Captain, at the very moment of Clara’s entrance into the room, was busily engaged in packing a few articles which he considered proper and appropriate to his new standing in life.

The chief of these articles consisted of a high and very glossy silk hat, which was at that moment perched upon the Captain’s head; and a pair of Wellington boots, as glossy in appearance as the hat, and into which the Captain was struggling. Indeed, he had just got them on, and was very red in the face from his exertions, when Clara darted in. Before she had had time to utter a word, Mrs. Quist—who had been regarding her lord and master with an expression half of admiration, half of contempt—turned towards Clara, with a view to relieving her feelings.

“Look at ‘im, Miss,” she exclaimed, extending a hand towards the Captain, who had got on to his legs, and was swaggering about the little parlour—“did you ever see sich a figger in all yer born days? Do yer think I’d ever ‘ave led *that* to the altar—if I’d knowed wot ‘e was a comin’ to in ‘is old days? Begin at the top”—she indicated the Captain’s hat—“an’ ‘e’s fit fer ‘Igh Park, or a drorin’-room; come to ‘is middle”—the indignant woman indicated the Captain’s seafaring blue coat—“an’ ‘e’s a decent man an’ a sailor; look at ‘is legs (if so be as you’ll excuse sich a remark, Miss)—an’ ‘e might be a coachman out o’ work, or the bottom ‘arf of a French Markiss. ‘Im in a circus; w’y ‘e don’t know no more about ‘osses than a bluebottle!”

“‘Old ‘ard, my dear—‘old ‘ard,” remonstrated the Captain, surveying his boots with a very proper pride—“I’m merely a livin’ up to me character; w’y, a get-up like this ‘ere ‘ll even make the ‘osses ‘ave a proper respect for me.” Then, observing suddenly that Clara stood, with clasped hands, looking from him to his wife appealingly, and with tears in her eyes, he checked himself, and came slowly towards her.

“Why, my lass,” he said, in a tone of sympathy—“wot’s wrong with yer? You look as if you’d ‘ad a fright of some kind—don’t she, Missis?”

“I want your help,” said Clara, glancing behind her towards the door. “My friend—the unfortunate man of whom I spoke—Mr. Chater—”

The Captain immediately began to back away, in some perturbation. Mrs. Quist, on the other hand, readily divining that something was wrong, nodded to Clara quickly to continue what she had to say.

"Mr. Chater has—has escaped—and is here at this moment."

Mrs. Quist darted after Clara into the little passage; the Captain, scarcely knowing what he did, took off his hat, and held it pointed towards the door, as though it were a weapon, and he might defend himself with it. When, a moment later, Mrs. Quist and the girl came in, and the Captain, looking past them, saw Philip Chater enter the room, he immediately dived down behind the table on his knees, keeping only his eyes above the level of it.

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"Take 'im away! Don't let 'im come near me," he begged, in a hoarse and trembling whisper. Then, addressing Philip in a conciliatory tone, he added—"I never done nothink to you, ole pal, w'en you was in the flesh—an' all I asks is that you'll go back w'ere you come from—w'erever it is—an' sleep sound. I ain't done nothink to deserve spooks. Go back, my lad—go back!"

Philip, despite his own danger, burst into a roar of laughter. "There's nothing of the ghost about me, Quist," he said. "I think I can understand what you mean—and presently I'll explain everything. But, for the moment, I am in desperate peril; I've broken out of the jail here, and may be searched for at any moment. I want you to hide me."

The Captain rose from his knees, still somewhat doubtfully, and came slowly round the table; approached Philip in gingerly fashion; and finally ventured to take one of his hands; squeezed it—squeezed it a little more. Then his face broke up into smiles, and he clapped Philip jovially on the shoulder. Remembering, however, the more serious part of the business, he darted to the window, and drew the curtain across it; then sat down, breathing hard, and staring at Philip with all his might. Finally, he got up, and came to Philip again, and shook hands with him, as though to assure himself that he was solid flesh and blood.

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"This comes of keepin' bad company," ejaculated the Captain at last. "You gits yerself in the river—an' very bloated you looks, I do assure you—you gits into jail—an' you likewise gits out of it; an' you frightens a honest sailor-man (leastways—sailor-man retired; circus-man now)—you frightens him nearly out of 'is wits. But still—it's good to see you again; an', if the Missis can find us a drain o' something'—jist a toothful apiece—we can talk over things comfortable-like."

It was just at this moment, as Mrs. Quist turned smilingly to get out bottles and glasses, that Philip discovered, to his consternation that little Clara Siggs, who had sat down on a sofa near him, was swaying to and fro, with a very white face, although she bravely tried to smile. He had just time to step forward, and catch her in his arms, when she gave a sort of gasp, and fainted dead away. Overwrought for so long, she had given way, now that the danger seemed over, and the tension relaxed.

Bitterly blaming himself for having exposed her to such trials, he picked her up tenderly in his arms, and, guided by Mrs. Quist, carried her upstairs to her room. There, being assured by that good woman that it was nothing more serious than a sudden attack of faintness, Philip left her in charge of the girl, and rejoined the Captain in the room below.

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"One thing I must ask you, Captain," he said when he was seated with that gentleman at the table—"and that is, in regard to your taking me for a ghost. What induced you to imagine I was anything but the Philip Crowdy whom you knew on the voyage from Australia?"

On this, the Captain, with much detail, entered into a full account of the finding of the body of the unfortunate Dandy Chater by himself and Cripps; and, although he did not know, of course, the name of the latter, the description he gave, and his statement that he had seen the little man on the night of his invasion of the upper room at "The Three Watermen," enabled Philip to identify the man who had been with him when the body was found. For the first time, too, he understood the reason for the Doctor's consternation on meeting him in the garden of the Cottage.

"I'm not surprised," said Philip, "that you should have been upset at seeing me. The body you took from the river was that of my brother—whom I never knew in life. He was, I have every reason to believe, murdered; at all events, I found him lying dead on the river bank. I took his belongings; I took his place—and, by Heaven, Captain—I've taken his sins too. I've been chased and hunted like a dog for his sins; I've had the best woman in the world turn from me, as from a leper, for his sins; and I've been in jail for his sins. I put on this hideous disguise, at the whim of a moment; and now I cannot shake it off."

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"But there's them as would swear to you, if need be," urged the Captain.

"Not yet," replied Philip, hurriedly. "The time may come when I shall be glad to declare who I really am; for the present it is impossible. Meanwhile—what of the body you found in the river?"

"Well—I've kep'a eye on the papers," replied the Captain—"an' I've read accounts of the inquest. They set it forth, clear and reg'lar, as 'ow the body 'ad bin left on the river-bank, by two parties wot was evidently afraid of 'avin' their names mixed up in the business; of 'ow there was nothink on the body to show who it was—an' the injury to the 'ead might have bin caused by barges, or anythink of that kind. Verdict in consequence—unknown man—found drowned. And, I suppose, buried accordin'."

"Yes—it merely leaves me in a worse position than before. So far as all the world knows—as all the world believes—Dandy Chater is alive—and must stand his trial for the sins he has committed. I have taken his place—his papers—his keys; I should be bound to confess that I saw his body on the shore. If they did not swear that I murdered him, they might laugh at the story, and refuse to recognise any mass of corruption dug up out of the grave as the real Dandy Chater."

"Then wot are you a goin' to do?" asked the Captain, in perplexity.

"There is but one chance for me," said Philip, thoughtfully. "I have a suspicion that I know who the

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real murderer of Dandy Chater was; if I can once see him, and force from him any confession, my way is clear. For that purpose I escaped to-night—that purpose and another. And in that I want you to help me.”

“There’s my ‘and on it,” said the Captain, quickly. “But I don’t think you’ll want much ‘elp, Phil,” he added, with a laugh. “Any man as can go a breakin’ jail like you, ought to be a match for most people. ‘Ow *did* yer manage it, Phil?”

Philip laughed softly to himself. “It was rather a tough business,” he said. “It all had to be done in a few minutes. I was left alone in a waiting-room for a moment, in going from one part of the prison to another. There was a sort of skylight high up—with hardly too much room for a cat to wriggle through. But there were ropes to it, to open and shut it—and you know what I can do when there’s a rope handy, Quist.”

The Captain nodded darkly and rubbed his hands; contemplated his friend with admiration and begged him to proceed.

“I nearly tore my clothes off my back, in getting through; but, once through, there was only a roof to slide down—a yard to cross—and a wall. Luckily I found a builder’s pole lying against it and scrambled up that; dropped over, and found that dear girl in the street. She brought me here.”

The more they discussed the matter, the more evident it became that Philip must be got away before daylight. For a long time, the Captain ruminated over the matter, wondering what to do. He suggested, from time to time, the most absurd and impracticable disguises—even offering to lend his precious top-boots for the occasion. But at last a really brilliant idea suggested itself to him.

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“The circus!” he exclaimed, slapping his leg with much vehemence. “That’s the very thing! I’m a goin’ out to see them move the show, quite early to-morrow morning—just to see ‘ow it’s done. They’ve got to start precious early, so as to reach the town they’re a goin’ to in time for the performance at night. Now—wishin’ to identify myself with the business as early as possible—I’ve asked ‘em to send in one of the caravans to fetch me—so as to make a sort of percession of it. As the show’s mine, of course they don’t mind a gratifyin’ a little weakness like that. Now—if you can’t ‘ide in a caravan—w’ere can you ‘ide, Phil?”

“It sounds like the very thing,” replied Philip. “You can drop me quietly on the road, when we are clear of the town, and nothing need be known of me. But what of this girl, who has been so brave and loyal to me? I can’t leave her behind.”

“That’s easy arranged,” responded the Captain. “Let ‘er stop ‘ere; the Missis ‘ll be glad to give ‘er shelter as long as you like; an’ you may be sure she’s in good ‘ands.”

Philip gratefully accepted the offer; and, neither of them being disposed for sleep, they sat and talked the night away, or such part of it as remained. Philip duly impressed upon the Captain the necessity for preserving silence concerning the real story of Dandy Chater—making his plea more forcible by telling the worthy man of the difficulties he might find himself in, should it become known that he had harboured a fugitive, or assisted him to escape.

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Soon after four o’clock in the morning, wheels were heard outside, in the quiet street, and a knock sounded at the door. The Captain—spying out the land from the window—signalled to Philip that all was right, and they prepared to set out. Mrs. Quist had come downstairs, and had announced that the girl was sleeping soundly.

“Then I won’t disturb her,” said Philip. “I know that she will be well cared for, and I am more grateful than I can express. Will you tell her, when she wakes, that I am safe, and have gone with the Captain; that I will find an opportunity of seeing her mother, and assuring her that her child is safe? And now, if the Captain can lend me a cap of some sort, I am ready.”

The Captain would have pressed his own gorgeous silk hat upon his friend, but being dissuaded from this with some difficulty, provided him with a cloth cap, which would be less likely to attract attention.

Then the Captain sallied out, to be sure that the coast was clear; and, there being no one in sight, Philip took leave of Mrs. Quist, and darted into the caravan, which moved off at once.

It was still quite dark when they got clear at last of the streets of Chelmsford; and Philip Chater was beginning to congratulate himself upon the fact of having got out of his difficulties so neatly, when the man who acted as driver, and to whom the Captain must have given some word of warning, rapped smartly on the side of the vehicle.

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The Captain, who had begun to fill his pipe, and had quite settled down to the enjoyment of his ride, popped open the little window in the side of the caravan, and put out his head. “What’s wrong, mess-mate?” he asked.

The man informed him rapidly that there was a gig—so far as he could make out, judging by the twin lights—coming over the hill behind them from the town—and evidently coming at a great rate. Indeed, in the silence—the caravan having stopped—they could hear the swift beat of a horse’s hoofs.

“Ask him what road we are on,” said Philip.

The Captain did so, and the man replied promptly that they were heading towards Bamberton.

“Just where I want to go,” whispered Philip to the Captain. “Now—I don’t want to get you into trouble, old friend—as you would most assuredly, if I were found in your company. Therefore, you can drop me here by the roadside, and go on without me.”

"I'm damned if I do!" said the Captain, sturdily.

"But you must," replied Philip. "If I remain here, I shall certainly be taken, quite apart from getting you into difficulties. On the other hand, if I drop out in the darkness, I can lie close under a hedge until they've gone by. And you, for your own satisfaction, can give them a false direction."

This last point appeared to settle the matter with the Captain; Philip left him chuckling hugely to himself. Just as the caravan was beginning to move on again and while Philip lay crouched behind a hedge, the gig dashed up, and drew rein within hearing of him. 236

"Wot!" exclaimed the Captain, in a voice of apparent indignation, the moment he heard that a prisoner was missing, and was believed to have taken the road to Bamberton—"You don't mean a tall clean-shaven dark chap, without a 'at?" On being assured that that was a correct description of the fugitive, the Captain became more indignant than ever.

"If you goes along that 'ere road to the left, about a 'underd yards further back—you'll nab 'im—sure as eggs," he exclaimed. "'E was runnin' like a good 'un—tol' me 'e was a doin' it for a wager. W'en you ketches 'im, guv'nor—'it 'im one fer me—will yer—for a tryin' ter deceive."

"I should like to have a look inside your caravan," said the man, quietly, jumping down from the gig.

"W'y—certainly," responded the Captain. "It's a nice roomy place, pervided yer don't git yer feet in the fireplace. I'd 'ave 'ad it painted special, if I'd knowed you was comin'."

The man looked in at the open door of the vehicle; looked sharply at the Captain, and at the driver; and climbed into the gig again.

"Drive on," he said; and the gig turned back on the road it had come.

"Drive on, mess-mate," said the Captain, climbing into the caravan. 237

Philip Chater, lying behind the hedge, watched the two vehicles until they were out of sight in the darkness; then, when there seemed nothing more to be feared, he crept out, and struck off towards Bamberton.

"What was the message?" he muttered to himself. "'I love him—and believe in his innocence.' Dear girl! I'll see you to-night—if I die for it!" 238

HAUNTED

That one thought dominated all else in the mind of Philip Chater. She believed him innocent—and she loved him. True, the message was not for him, in reality; it was for the man who lay in an unknown grave. But, having taken that dead man's place, he claimed this message also, as belonging to him.

"I have taken the burden of his sins upon me—I am in peril of my life on account of them," he thought. "Surely I have the right to claim this sweeter portion of what was his, as some leaven in the weight of my punishment. Yes—I'll see her first; after that, if they capture me, I'll go back with a light heart."

Caution was necessary in approaching the village; for, by the time he reached it, daylight had fully come, and the people were astir. Keeping well on the outskirts of it, and yet in a place from which he could easily and rapidly reach the spot he had marked out in his mind as his destination, he came to a little copse, on the edge of some fields, and settled himself, as comfortably as possible, in a deep dry ditch, overhung with brambles and bushes, which completely hid him from the sight of any one passing near. Knowing that he must wait until nightfall, before daring to venture out, he resolved to remain in this place, with all the patience he could muster. 239

He had borrowed from Captain Quist a little tobacco and a pipe; and, after cautiously looking about him, he filled and lit this, and began to feel more resigned to his position. From where he lay, he could see, through the tangled growth above him, the towers and chimneys of Chater Hall; raising his head a little he could see a path, which wound across some slightly rising ground, and appeared to lead from the Hall down to the road near which he lay—entry to the road from it being obtained through a wooden gate in the high paling, which surrounded the grounds at the point where they joined the road. The Hall being high above him, he could see this path in its windings and twistings very clearly; and, as it was a short cut to the village, it appeared to be used pretty often.

It amused and interested the fugitive, lying hidden there, to watch this path, and those who came down it; he found himself wondering idly whether he should ever tread that path again or set foot in Chater Hall, and under what circumstances.

Knowing nothing of the locality, Philip had not chosen his hiding place so well as he had hoped; for presently he was startled by the noise of wheels behind him. Rising hurriedly, he looked over a bank, sheer down into a road below—a road not so broad as that which lay at some distance in front of him, but broad enough for vehicles. Indeed, the vehicle which Philip had heard had stopped immediately below him, and a man in it was alighting. So close was it, and so immediately underneath where he lay in the thick undergrowth, that Philip could hear distinctly what this man said to the driver. 240

"I brought you this way—because I have a fancy for going up to the Hall unannounced—just a mere whim of mine. I can get over from here. It'll be—ha—ha—a little surprise for them—won't it!"

The man muttered something, which Philip could not catch; received his fare; turned his horse's head, and drove back the way he had come. The man stood quite still in the road, until the vehicle was out of sight; then began to climb the bank, which led to the place where Philip was concealed.

At first, Philip was afraid that the man had seen him, and was coming straight for him; he dived down, and lay flat, scarcely daring to breathe. But the stranger, who evidently knew the place well, came on steadily, until he stood within a few yards of the spot where Philip crouched; then he stopped, and looked straight across at the distant chimneys of Chater Hall. As he stood there, Philip found himself watching the man with an eagerness greater than he would have felt at the appearance of any chance stranger; for he knew the face of this man. Once again, he seemed to stand at the entrance to a little court, leading down to the river, at Woolwich; once again, to see a man dash past him, and to catch a glimpse of a face—gone in an instant, and seemingly forgotten—but well enough remembered now. Again, too, he seemed to stand on the terrace at Chater Hall, on that night of the burglary, striving to peer in through a window; to see the curtain suddenly flung back, and the room bright with lights, and that same face staring out at him. Small wonder that his heart beat heavily, as he lay crouched among the bushes, looking up at the man above him. 241

The stranger, for his part, seemed to hesitate what to do; made a step forward more than once, as if to go boldly across the road, and up the path to the house before him; and as often stopped, and turned about, and waited where he was.

Philip Chater was beginning to wonder what was to happen, and was half resolved—in the wild hurry of the thoughts which came crowding upon him—to spring out, and confront the man, when another figure seemed to spring almost from the grass near at hand, and to make rapidly towards the first comer. Philip, raising his head quickly, no sooner caught sight of this second man, than he dropped down flat again, at the bottom of the ditch.

It was Inspector Tokely; and that gentleman came forward with a threatening aspect, and stopped within about a yard of the other, who was much taller than himself.

"Mr. Ogledon, I believe," said the Inspector, grimly; and Philip almost jumped out of his place again, at the mention of that name.

"Well—what of it?" was the surly reply; and it almost seemed to the listening man as though the speaker looked Tokely up and down superciliously as he spoke. 242

"What of it, sir!" cried the other, fiercely. "This of it, Mr. Ogledon—that you have insulted and maltreated the Law, as personified in me—in *me*, sir! That I have been lured into your presence, and, while in the execution of my duty, have been struck on a tender spot—to wit, the head—by a debauched companion of yours, and with a hard and heavy substance—to wit, a decanter; such assault being committed in order to delay, frustrate, postpone, or prevent the arrest of a certain person against whom I held a warrant. Damme, sir—what have you to say to that?" exclaimed the little man, suddenly losing his legal technicalities in an outburst of fury.

"I dare say you think you have cause of complaint against me"—began the other, coolly; but Tokely burst in again, more furiously than ever.

"Cause of complaint!" he almost shrieked. "When a man—and that man an officer of the Law—has a bump raised on his head, which compels him to wear his hat like a giddy youth on a bank-holiday excursion, and which prevents his lying with comfort in his bed—and the abettor of the outrage talks about cause of complaint!—I wonder, sir, what you will think when you occupy a cell, on account of this—eh, sir?"

"I am extremely sorry," replied Ogledon—"very sorry indeed that you should have been caused any inconvenience. My friend is not—not responsible for his actions at times—and he—he mistook you for some one else." All this time, Ogledon was working round the Inspector, and watching him narrowly. The Inspector, for his part, respecting the size and apparent strength of the other, began to move away; but flung back a taunt or two as he went.

"You shall hear from me again, sir!" cried the little man, savagely. "You and your decanter! You may like to know that I got my prisoner, after all."

"To the devil with your prisoner!" cried Ogledon without looking round. The little man stopped, although at a safe distance, and even came back a pace or two.

"Oho!" he cried, with a vicious laugh—"I thought he was a friend of yours? I suppose you don't own him now—eh?"

"I certainly own no interest in any prisoners," said the other, glancing round at Tokely for a moment, and then turning away again.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Inspector, more loudly even than before. "Yet you don't mind living in his house, and knocking people about with his decanters!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Ogledon, with a new and sudden interest.

The Inspector came a little nearer. "About your friend—Mr. Dandy Chater!" With this last shot, he turned and began to walk away down the hill.

Philip, looking out cautiously, saw the man who had been addressed as Ogledon start, as if a blow had been struck him; hesitate for a moment, with a face that was ghastly; and then start off at a run after Tokely. The Inspector, who was totally unprepared for pursuit, was overtaken in a few strides; seized; swung round; and confronted with the startled face of the other man.

"Stop—stop—and listen to me!" cried Ogledon, wildly. "What of this—this man—this prisoner—this"—he appeared to have some difficulty in getting out the name from his throat—as though it stuck there a little—"this Dandy Chater?"

"Ah—that stirs you up a bit—does it?" said Tokely, grinning. "Let me tell you then, that your friend Mr. Dandy Chater lies at this moment in Chelmsford Jail, awaiting his trial for murder—ah—that makes your face turn white—eh?—murder committed in this very village."

Ogledon had dropped his hands from the other's shoulders, and was staring at him, with an expression of stupid wonderment, incredulity and deadly fear. After a moment or two, he said, in a sort of whisper—"Then I did read of it; I haven't merely seen the name in every paper I've picked up—just in the same fashion as I have seen it on the lips of every man I met; heard it in every wind that blew; seen it spelled in the stars on every night-sky." He broke off suddenly, and looked at the other man, as if only just aware at that moment of his presence; looked at him silently for a space; and then burst into a peal of the most frightful laughter imaginable.

"There's nothing like being merry, when you've got a chance," said the Inspector, savagely.

"Merry!" cried the other, with another shout of laughter. "You'd make the dead rise from their graves, to laugh at such a jest as this! Merry! And so you've got Dandy Chater safe in Chelmsford Jail—have you? Well—keep him safe; lock and bolt and bar him in—and stop up every chink and keyhole—or, by Heaven!—Dandy Chater may give you the slip, my man! Dandy Chater in Chelmsford Jail!"

He burst into another frightful roar of laughter, and turned away; while the Inspector, after looking at him oddly, for a few moments, continued his way down the hill towards the road. Ogledon stopped in the same spot as before, near where Philip still lay, and sat down on the bank, above the very ditch in which the fugitive crouched, but with his back towards him.

"My God—what does this mean?" He spoke aloud, quite unconsciously, in the strong emotion which was upon him. "Is this some devil's trick, to frighten and trouble me? Or has Something come back to earth, to take up again its old way of life, and mock me?" He stretched out one clenched hand, and looked at it. "With this hand I struck him down; my eyes saw him lying dead; other eyes have seen him—food for worms—taken from the river. Yet this Thing starts up again, full of life, the very next day; haunts the places where he was known; appears even to me; stands out as a living fact to all men, and is even printed about, in black and white, before my eyes. Am I going mad; is this some distortion of the brain? Do I dream that every one talks of him, even in a chance meeting like this a

few minutes since—or what is it?”

After a time, he got up, and spoke more resolutely.

“I’ve allowed myself to think of him too much; I’ll do so no longer. I’ve heard of men who, dwelling on one frightful vision always, grow at last to see it in everything about them—hear it in every word that’s uttered—until it fills every fibre of their being, like some horrible disease, and saps their reason and their life. I’ll have no more of it; the man is dead, and I stand in his place; let that end it.”

He turned about resolutely, and went down by the road the Inspector had taken. After a little time, Philip, from his place of concealment, saw him mounting the path opposite, on the way to Chater Hall.

Through the weary hours, Philip waited, crouched where he was, cramped and stiff, until night came on, and the moon rose, in ghostly fashion, over the hill before him. Then, very cautiously, and looking all about him in case of surprise, he started for the Cottage.

There was a recklessness upon him, greater than any he had felt yet. What happened after this night he scarcely seemed to care; to see that one woman once again, and hold her in his arms, and hear from her own lips the message she had sent him, seemed enough. Whatever Fate might have in store for him after that did not seem to matter; this one night, at least, he was free, and he was going to the woman he loved.

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Still, with all his recklessness, he was careful not to expose himself to any danger of capture; in a little time, he became quite an adept at dodging behind hedges, or dropping down flat among thick undergrowth, when any one came near him. But he reached the boundary hedge of the garden he remembered so well at last, and crouched behind it, striving to peer through—wondering how he should reach her, or make his presence known.

Voices in the garden, quite near to him, struck upon his ear; voices of a man and a woman—that of the man soft, smooth, and pleading—that of the woman angry, contemptuous, and scornful. And he knew both voices at once.

The two who talked in that garden in the moonlight appeared to be further up the lawn than the spot where he was; looking eagerly in that direction, he saw that the regularity of the trim hedge was broken by a thick growth of small trees, whose branches swept down to the ground. Gliding along noiselessly, he got amongst these, and lay flat, within a few feet of the pair upon the lawn; could see them distinctly, standing there facing each other—Ogledon and Madge Barnshaw. That they had arrived at a crisis of some kind in their talk was evident; for Madge stood proudly erect and defiant, looking at the man, who slashed savagely at the grass with a cane he held.

“Will nothing move you?” Ogledon was saying, without looking up at her. “Do you think it is nothing for me, who am no mere boy, to be the sport of a girl—do you think it’s nothing for me to have to plead, again and again, with you, when it is my nature to bend people to my will, and gain what I desire by force?”

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“I have told you—many, many times already—that you might as well fling yourself against a rock, as strive to move me by any pleading. You are a coward, in any case, to assail me like this, when I have already told you that my heart is given to some one else——”

“Bah!—a mere girlish whim—a boy-and-girl affair, that should have been forgotten and done with in the days of pinafores. Besides, Dandy Chater is”—he hesitated, and seemed for a moment uncertain what to say; turned the sentence swiftly, and asked instead, with his keen eyes raised to her face—“By the way—where is this wonderful lover of yours?”

There was a pause for a moment, while the listener almost held his breath, and while Ogledon never took his eyes from her face. Then she went a little nearer to him, and held her head more proudly still.

“In a prison—there to await his trial on a fearful charge—of which I believe him innocent. But, though he appeared twice as black as men paint him, and as you, his evil spirit, have tried to make him, I would hold to him to the last; would cry, before you and all others—‘I love him—I love him—I love him!’ Now, what think you your pleading will do for you?”

The man had turned, and walked a step or two away; his hand had gone up nervously to his lips. “What does it mean?” Philip heard him mutter. “They all say it—even she says it. Go where I will, this Thing follows me—this name is dinned into my ears.” He turned swiftly towards her. “Why do you lie to me?” he cried harshly; “why do you repeat what every one else repeats? Do you think to frighten me away by such——” He stopped confusedly, and laughed. “There—I don’t know what I am saying; I—I lose myself sometimes. I—I’m not well; I’ll come—some other time—to see you.”

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Without another word he turned quickly and hurried out of the garden leaving the girl standing alone in the moonlight. Philip waited until he heard the gate click, and the footsteps of the man dying away in the distance; then he came out of his hiding-place, and spoke her name in a whisper. She turned about swiftly, and would have cried out, but that he caught her in his arms, and laid a hand lightly on her lips.

“Hush, dearest,” he whispered—“I have escaped from prison, to come to you; just to look into your dear eyes—to touch your lips—to know that all is well with you, and that you are not changed towards me. Don’t speak for a moment; there is much that I must say to you. There is small chance of my final escape; I must I fear inevitably be caught, and taken back again to stand my trial.”

“But you are innocent, Dandy dear,” she whispered, hurriedly; “and you can prove your innocence.”

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"As God above is my witness, I am absolutely innocent," he replied. "But I cannot—I dare not prove it; some day you will understand the reason. If I was never firm upon this matter before, I am firm from to-night. But, if it should go hard with me, and there should be no way of escape, I want you to promise one thing."

"Anything—everything," she whispered, earnestly.

"If it should come to that, and there is no other way—find the man who was here with you just now—and ask him to tell you all he knows about Dandy Chater. He—and he alone—can establish my innocence. But this must only be done as a last resource. Will you promise that?"

She had begun to question him wildly and eagerly, when he suddenly raised his hand to silence her; they both stood listening. The garden gate had clicked again.

Philip dropped down among the shadows of the trees, and crept in amongst them again. Across the turf came a figure, noiselessly, and stopped before Madge, who had walked a few paces away from where Philip lay. The figure was that of Ogledon.

"I had no intention of troubling you again—at least, to-night"—he said, in a curiously strained voice, as though he were keeping control of it with difficulty—"but there is something I should like to ask you. I have been away—on the Continent—and have only returned a few hours ago. This lover of yours and cousin of mine—this Dandy Chater—"

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"In Chelmsford Jail," she reminded him, with a smile.

"In Chelmsford Jail. When—when did you see him last?"

She was on the point of answering, in some equivocal fashion which should not betray the fugitive, when she stopped, struck dumb by the expression on Ogledon's face. He was looking past her, at something behind; turning, she saw Philip standing bareheaded and perfectly still in the moonlight, against the background of dark trees.

Ogledon stood for a moment, with his eyes starting, and his breath coming and going in gasps, while Philip stood absolutely rigid; then, with a terrible cry, he dropped forward upon his knees, and covered his face with his hands. When he ventured to look up again, Philip had vanished into the shadows.

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NEPTUNE TO THE RESCUE

Not daring to venture near the Cottage again, Philip got as near to the village as he could, and hung about, until lights were gleaming only in the upper windows of cottages, and until the doors of the Chater Arms had been closed for some time upon the last roosting yokel who had had more than was good for him. His purpose was to see Betty Siggs, and assure her, in accordance with his promise, of Clara's welfare. But it took a longer time to carry out his purpose than he had anticipated.

Over and over again, when he was almost within touch of the place, he would fancy he heard a door being opened, or that footsteps were coming cautiously towards him; and would make a dash back into the darkness. At last, however, he managed to get round to the back of the inn, and to take a survey of its windows.

Now, it so happened that two of those windows were lighted—clearly showing that some one else was going to bed, in addition to Toby Siggs and his wife. Knowing nothing about the disposition of the various rooms upstairs, Philip was, for a time, at a loss what to do; being dreadfully afraid that he might rouse the wrong party and bring disaster upon himself. At last, tired with waiting, he determined to take the risk, and to throw a few small pebbles at the larger of the two lighted windows. This he did—sending the stones rattling smartly against the glass once or twice—and then crept into the darkness, and awaited results.

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Unfortunately, it happened that the chief guest room at the Chater Arms was the largest room upstairs; and that Mr. and Mrs. Siggs, in their modesty, and with an eye to business, occupied a smaller apartment. And in that guest room, at that particular time, reposed the important figure of Inspector Tokely, who had been stopped, in his projected return to London that afternoon, by the intelligence that his prisoner had broken jail, and was thought to be in the neighbourhood of Bamberton.

At first, the rattle of the stones had no effect upon the sleeping officer of the Law; but Philip's second attempt roused him from sleep, and drove him to the unwelcome thought that some one was playing practical jokes upon him, as a form of rustic humour. Not at all relishing this, he sprang out of bed, just as a third handful pattered against the panes.

The indignant Tokely dashed to the window, and drew up the blind; then, unable to see anything, he flung up the window-sash, and poked out his head.

"Who's down there?" he cried out. "You'd better come out—because I know who you are, and I'll lay you by the heels to-morrow morning, as sure as a gun. Now then—are you coming out of it?"

Philip, who had drawn himself up in the darkest corner of the yard, horror-struck at his blunder, very naturally declining to obey the Inspector's bidding, that indignant man continued to shout various threats of future punishment into the darkness, until he contrived to rouse his host and hostess; so that, in a minute or two, the second lighted window was raised, and old Toby Siggs put his head out, with a most prodigious nightcap upon it, and looked round at Tokely.

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"Wot's all this?" he asked, in his slow heavy fashion. "If so be as you 'ave a pain anywheres, the Missis 'll be on'y too glad to git up, an' make a poultice, or anythink of that kind, double quick; on'y don't go a 'owlin' at the moon like that there—jist like a lost dorg—'cos it ain't restful at this time o' night."

"I'm not howling at the moon—or at anything else," retorted Tokely, savagely. "And I'm not in pain, you idiot. Only some yokel has had the impudence to keep on shying pebbles at my window, this half hour past—by way of a joke, I suppose. I wish they'd try any one else's window, for a change."

"Wot did you 'ave for supper?" was the extraordinary query propounded by Toby, after a thoughtful pause.

"What the deuce has that got to do with it?" snapped out the Inspector.

"Oh—nothink," replied Toby, innocently. "On'y I thought you might p'raps 'ave bin dreaming—that's all."

Tokely muttered something decidedly uncomplimentary under his breath, and jerked down the blind—quite forgetting, in his rage, about the window. Moreover, being thoroughly roused from any sleep, or thoughts of it, he sat down near his bedstead, to think about the matter, and to decide how best he could visit his wrath upon some one for the offence on the morrow.

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Sitting thus, engaged with his own angry thoughts, he lost count of time, until presently he was startled by another sound of the striking of pebbles against glass. But the curious thing was, that it was not his window which received the attack this time, but another—for the sound was far less distinct. The Inspector quietly blew out his candle, and crept to the window.

In a few moments, there was another little shower of pebbles; and the Inspector, quietly drawing aside the blind, peered down into the darkness. Then he heard the creak of a window being softly raised, and a bright light, as from a candle, fell on the ground below, and on a figure standing there. And this figure, raising its head, and looking up, revealed to the watching Tokely the face of Dandy Chater, who should have been, by all right and propriety, at that moment in Chelmsford Jail.

"Little mother!" came in a quick whisper from below; and a voice—that of Mrs. Siggs—responded promptly in the same cautious fashion.

"Oh, my dear, dear boy. Wait just one blessed minute, and I'll come down to you," cried Betty, softly.

"Wait just one blessed minute, and I'll come down to you," muttered the Inspector to himself. "This is a piece of luck, indeed!" The Inspector crept away from the window, and began, hurriedly and noiselessly, to get into his garments.

In a few moments, he heard, as he had fully anticipated, a rustling upon the staircase, and a quick footstep going downwards; immediately after, the cautious drawing back of bolts, and the turning of a key; then, the subdued sound of voices. The Inspector dressed with greater rapidity than ever.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Siggs had drawn Philip into the little parlour, and had laid her old head—nightcap and all—upon his shoulder, and was crying comfortably. It was some time before she could compose herself sufficiently to listen to what he had to say; but she did at last, only punctuating what he said by an occasional sob.

"First—for my time is very short—about Clara," he said. "I blame myself horribly for all the anxiety she has caused you; but you know, little mother, that she fell in love with that scapegrace brother of mine, and only transferred her affections to me, without knowing it. But the child's safe—I give you my word for it; and I think you can trust me, Betty, to deliver her into your hands again, when the time comes for speaking the truth. But that time is not yet; for the present, you must be silent; everything I value most on earth depends on that. I am getting nearer, every hour, little mother, to the end of my difficulties; I am on the track of the man who murdered my brother, and can declare my innocence. If I can remain free but a few hours longer, I may be able to devise some plan—some way out of the tangle. Don't you see my strange position; that, for my own sake, as well as yours, I want to declare to the world that I am Philip Chater, and innocent of all these sins which have been visited upon me; while, for the sake of one dear woman, I want to remain Dandy Chater, because—God help me!—she loves Dandy Chater—and I am a stranger to her."

"Well—yer don't stand much chance of goin' free if yer chucks stones up at that there Tokely's winder," said Betty, laughing through her tears.

"I had no idea that the man was still here," replied Philip, "and, of course, I couldn't be expected to know which window was yours; I had to take the risk of that. But I saw his light go out; there's no doubt that he is sleeping peacefully, and dreaming of anything but Dandy Chater."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the door leading from the staircase was opened abruptly, and Toby Siggs thrust in his head, and looked at them with a scared face. On the principle that whatever Betty did was sure to be right, Toby would not have thought of questioning her, concerning her championship of the supposed Dandy Chater, or of her endeavours to hide him. Obedient to Philip's injunction, Mrs. Siggs had refrained from entering into any explanation with Toby—who was, if the truth be told, somewhat of a gossip. But, at the present moment, loyalty to his wife, no less than to the man whose cause she upheld, had prompted him to leave his chamber, and creep down to give them warning.

"Betty, old gal—that there Tokely—as is the deepest ever I see—an' the most careful of 'is precious skin—as gorn off to fetch assistance." It took Toby a long time to say this, in his slow and ponderous fashion; but he got it out at last, and stood nodding his head prodigiously when he had finished.

"What do you mean?" asked Philip quickly, making a movement towards the door. "I've heard no one about the house; how could he have got out?"

"Artfulness—downright perlice artfulness—an' nothink else," replied Toby, slowly. "Arter you chucked stones at 'is winder, an' arter I'd 'ad that little argyment with 'im, I thought 'e'd gone to by-bye; but not 'e. I 'eard a scrapin' agin' the wall, an' looked out; an' there was that Tokely, shinnin' down a sort of rope, made of the Missis' best company sheets. 'E's gone straight down to the village constable, to get 'im an' a few more—so as to make sure of yer, Master Dandy. An', by the noise—'ere they come!"

Philip Chater, even while Toby's slow speech was in progress, had become aware of a noise of feet and a murmur of voices outside. "It's all over, Betty, I'm afraid," he said, in a low voice—"but I think I'll try a dash for it. Good-bye, little mother; don't fear for me."

Feeling more valiant than usual, with a good backing of yokels, and the village constable, Inspector Tokely came straight into the room, and walked up to Philip, smiling grimly. Before, however, he had had an opportunity for saying a word, Philip stepped forward, and caught him by the arms; swung him round, by the impulse of that movement, straight to Toby Siggs, and dashed headlong at the crowd in the doorway. Toby, for his part, receiving the full weight of the Inspector on his stockinged feet, immediately held fast to that gentleman, and began to pummel him soundly on his own account—heedless of the fact that Philip had only been able to fight his way into the midst of a considerable crowd of men, and had there been secured. The Inspector, writhing under his punishment, and struggling vainly to get away, was shouting out orders, entreaties, and threats, in the most confusing fashion.

At last, some sort of order being restored, and the Inspector released, the two principals in the little scene faced each other in Betty Siggs's parlour, with a crowd of eager faces about them.

"Well," gasped Tokely—"so I've got you, have I, Mr. Dandy Chater!"

"Pray be accurate, policeman," replied Philip, coolly. "You haven't got me; it's these good fellows you have to thank for that. I congratulate you on your bravery, policeman; you have brought a pretty good mob against me."

There was a smothered laugh at the expense of the Inspector, who turned rather red. "I knew you to be a dangerous character," he said—"and I did not intend that you should slip through my fingers again. For the present, Mr. Siggs"—he turned towards Toby, with a malicious grin on his face—"I must trouble you to give over this room—in the Queen's name—until such time as I can get a trap, to drive this man back to Chelmsford; one or two of us will wait here with him, until it arrives. He may be a desperate character, but he won't get over me in a hurry. Here—catch his arms, some of you."

Almost before Philip realised what had happened, his arms were pinioned, and he felt something hard and cold forced over his wrists. When the men fell away from him, he discovered that he was securely handcuffed.

"You're surely not going to drive me through the open country, with these things on my hands—are you?" he asked bitterly. "If I give you my word not to attempt to escape—"

"We won't trust your word, Dandy Chater," said Tokely, grinning again. "You've given us a pretty good chase, as it is—and any amount of trouble; and there are one or two people"—he glanced for a moment at Toby, and then at Betty Siggs—"against whom I intend to apply for warrants—for aiding and abetting you to escape, and for obstructing me in the execution of my duty. I've been hit over the head with decanters—and have barked myself painfully against trees—and have been struck heavily in the region of the ribs by—"

"If you should 'appen to refer to me, with that there last remark"—said Toby, slowly—"let me recommend that you don't go a jumping—promiscuous-like—on a man's corns, without so much as 'by yer leave.' I don't permit no man—much less a perliceman—to jump on me in my own parlour."

Without deigning any reply to this, the Inspector told off two or three of the men to remain with him, and dismissed the others outside the door, which he shut. The crowd by the sounds which proceeded from the yard, was evidently in no mood to go home to bed; but remained, discussing the matter excitedly, and no doubt taking much individual credit to itself, for the successful issue of the business.

For a long and weary half hour, Philip sat, with his eyes upon the ground, waiting until such time as the man who had been sent for a conveyance should return; and, during that time, a curious thing happened.

There sat next to him, a tall, thin individual, with a melancholy visage—a man who had not, curiously enough, taken any part in the actual fray, but who, nevertheless, had thrust himself forward eagerly, when the men who were to guard the prisoner were selected. Once or twice, Philip was under the curious impression that the man was striving to attract his attention; he lunged out one of his thin legs at him sideways, once or twice, while the Inspector happened to be engaged in conversation with the constable and the other men. At last, he found an excuse to get up from his chair, and pass in front of Philip; tripped—purposely, as it seemed over the prisoner's feet; and turned swiftly to make an apology.

"Beggin' yer pardon, sir, I'm sure—'adn't no intention of"—the words died away, in a sort of growl; but at the end of them, as the man bent his head to speak, Philip heard distinctly the whisper—"Cap'n Quist."

Philip was so astounded, and his heart began to beat so fast, at the probable thought that a friend was near at hand, that he could scarcely control himself. But he managed to keep his eyes fixed, apparently on the floor, even while he turned towards the man, who had resumed his seat. His astonishment was greater than ever, when he saw that man, on the pretext of scratching his arm, pull up his sleeve a little way, and disclose—so that Philip alone saw them—certain heavy tattoo marks, such as would scarcely be likely to be on the skin of any one but a sailor.

At that moment, wheels were heard at the front of the house, and, the door being unfastened by Toby—who had gone with Betty into the bar—a man came in, and walked straight through to where Tokely was standing.

"Couldn't get a trap, sir, anywheres; but I managed to get a fly—and it's at the door."

"All right—a fly will do better than anything; we'll have him safer there than elsewhere."

The man with the melancholy visage suddenly emitted a most extraordinary sound—a sound which, had it moved any part of his face in any way, might have been described as a laugh; but, as his countenance appeared as melancholy after it as before, it did not seem possible that it arose from mirth.

"What's the matter?" asked Tokely, turning towards the man.

"Nuffink, guv'nor. It's rather a nasty corf, that ketches me now and agin," replied the man.

Philip was thrust into the vehicle, together with the man of the melancholy countenance—who stuck close to him, and even held his arm, as though afraid of losing him—and Tokely. When one of the watchers suggested that he might want other assistance, in view of the prisoner proving refractory, Tokely admitted that it might be better for one of them to get on the box with the driver; but, immediately afterwards, thinking apparently that such extra precaution might be put down to cowardice on his part, he countermanded the order; so that the prisoner drove off with only the melancholy-looking man and Tokely inside, and the driver on the box.

Philip's mind was chiefly occupied with wonder as to what was going to happen. That the melancholy man was an emissary of Captain Quist, he did not doubt; at the same time, lest he should alarm the Inspector, and so frustrate any plan which might have been formed for his own

rescue, he sat still in a corner of the fly, apparently in a sulky humour, but really alert and watchful.

The moment came at last. A shrill whistle sounded somewhere out of the blackness of the night. It was answered, in an instant, with deafening intensity, by the melancholy man, who on the instant leapt upon Tokely, and seemed to be doing something extraordinary, in the midst of a violent struggle, with that gentleman's arms. In less time than it takes to tell, a figure appeared, through the glass of one window, racing along beside the vehicle; the door was wrenched open, and Philip was tumbled out, with the melancholy man literally on top of him, into the road; the door was slammed, and the horse, maddened by a cut across his haunches from a long whip, fairly took the bit in his teeth, and dashed straight down the road like a racer. The last that Philip saw of the vehicle, as he sat up in the road and looked after it, was it swaying from side to side of the road, while the unfortunate Tokely (whose arms had been pinioned behind him with true sailor-like adroitness) had his head thrust out of one window, and was vainly shouting to the driver.

Then, a familiar voice broke upon Philip's ear, and Captain Quist, looking ruefully at a tall silk hat, which lay battered in the roadway, and on which some one must have fallen, muttered a familiar phrase.

"That comes," said the Captain, "of gettin' into bad company."

DR. CRIPPS IS INCOHERENT

When that unfortunate and much battered football of Fate—Dr. Cripps—was left, stranded and alone, at Liverpool Street Station, he cast about in his mind as to what was best to be done. His small share of the spoils of the Sheffield robbery had been passed into the hands of a person, who had promised to effect a safe exchange; and Cripps was, as usual, remarkably short of money.

He remembered too, not with contrition, but with something of alarm, that he had, in a moment of forgetfulness, struck a man on a vital spot with a decanter, and left him apparently dead; so that there might be consequences to be feared. On the other hand, money must be screwed out of somebody, and he was at a loss to know to whom to turn for it. Woolwich was barren country; for the recent tragic events, and the stir created by the bank robbery, had scattered the band, and it was quite unlikely that he would have a chance of meeting any member of it.

However, the barren country had to be tried; much liquid refreshment was necessary to him, and it had to be obtained somewhere. Accordingly, for nearly a week he haunted those shady, out-at-elbows places near the river, in the hope of meeting a friend. But friends were scarce and shy; and, although he met one or two, and pleaded his position successfully, it was hard and uphill work. At the end of a week, he had come perilously near to spirituous starvation—and was, in direct consequence, more sober than he had been for years past.

His wits being much sharpened, as his brain became clearer, he began to think, with rising hope, of Bamberton, from which he had so unceremoniously taken flight. The idea appealed to him; with growing confidence, he remembered, in these more sober moments, that the man he had assaulted with the decanter had had but a passing glimpse of him, and might not be likely to recognise him. At all events, the distance was not great, and the place had a public-house—two public-houses, unless his eyes had deceived him. Brightened with this thought, and with the prospect of having a new field in which to borrow, and finding that he had sufficient money in his pocket to pay for the journey, he set off for Liverpool Street; and, in a little time, was standing—an incongruous figure enough in the spring landscape—outside the little station which was within a few miles of Bamberton, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, and wondering where he was to get a drink.

In the days—over a quarter of a century before—when Cripps had known Bamberton, the little town where the railway now ended had been but an insignificant village, and the railway (which had made its fortune) a thing undreamt of. At the present time, therefore, the Doctor stood on strange ground; and the past was so far away, that he had absolutely no idea in which direction Bamberton lay. Divided between the necessity for reaching the village, and the more pressing need for refreshment, the little man looked about him for some promising stranger, who might have a kindly heart and a spare threepence in his pocket.

Standing almost at his elbow, and staring down the road, in altogether as gloomy a fashion as himself, was a young man, quietly dressed in country style—a mere lad. Cripps, after glancing at him once or twice, edged towards him.

"I suppose, my friend," he said—"I suppose you don't happen to know the way towards Bamberton—do you?"

The young man looked at him for a moment, and then smiled. "I ought to know the way, sir," he replied; "I was born there."

"And a most excellent place to be born in, I should imagine," said Cripps. "Delightful scenery, and—and a public-house or two, just—just to relieve the monotony of things. Er—by the way—they don't seem to have one just about here—eh?"

"Just across the road," replied the young man, jerking his head in that direction.

Dr. Cripps began to conceive a dislike for the lad, as one who could not understand the true meaning of a hint; but he tried again. "Is—is the liquor there worth drinking?" he asked, in a confidential tone.

"It's a long time since I tried it," replied the young man carelessly.

Cripps saw an opening here; he laughed feebly, and clapped the young man on the shoulder. "Ha—ha—very good," he cried—"very good indeed. But you wouldn't object to tasting it now, I suppose?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders, without looking at Cripps, and made no reply. But the little man, whose thirst was rapidly getting the better of every other consideration, promptly seized him by the arm, and began to lead him across the road in a desperate hurry.

"You shall taste it, my young friend," he cried, in an ecstasy of good-fellowship. "Not—mind you—not that I would have any young man follow in my footsteps—for I, my young friend, am a wreck. But a little stimulant—especially at this hour of the day—(indeed, I might say, at any hour of the day)—is very necessary; it gives tone to the constitution."

It appeared to have given something besides tone to the Doctor's constitution; but he did not say so. He walked with his new friend into the little Railway Inn, and ordered refreshments for both; discovering, to his dismay, when asked for the price of them, that he had no money. He had performed the same excellent trick so often, that he was an adept at it; and tears of indignation actually sprang to his eyes, as he solemnly cursed the unknown man who must have stolen his purse—"containing gold, sir—gold—and my dear and sainted mother's portrait—a miniature, sir,

from which I would not have parted, except at the sacrifice of my last drop of blood. The gold, sir, was nothing—but the miniature—” Here the old sinner hid his face in the folds of a very doubtful-looking handkerchief, and appeared to weep.

The young man, whatever his suspicions may have been, was a good-natured fellow, and he paid the reckoning. Immediately, the little man became all smiles again, and raising his glass, insisted on drinking the young man’s health.

“If, my dear young friend, I could have the privilege of knowing to whom I am indebted—I should be glad; if I could pledge you by name—”

“My name’s Routley—Harry Routley,” replied the lad. “Your health, sir.”

“And yours, Mr. Routley,” responded Cripps. “Whatever station of life may be yours, sir, I am convinced that it is a station you adorn. Bamberton should be proud of you, Mr. Routley.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, and laughed a little bitterly. “At the present time,” he said—“neither Bamberton nor any other place is particularly proud of me, I think. And I have no distinct position in life.”

“That’s a pity—a great pity,” said Cripps gravely, shaking his head. “If a man has no position, the devil is likely to find him one. My young friend—I am sorry for you.”

“You needn’t be,” replied Harry, savagely. “It’s my own fault—and my own business, if it comes to that. I deserve everything I get. I sold the best man and the best master ever a lad had—and I don’t care what becomes of me.”

“Sold a man!” exclaimed Cripps. “I don’t understand you.”

“Don’t suppose you do,” replied Harry, recklessly. “Maybe, not belonging to these parts, you haven’t heard of Mr. Dandy Chater—eh?”

The unfortunate Cripps, with a gasp, dropped his glass to the floor, and fled. But, before he had managed to wrench open the door, Harry had laid a strong hand on his shoulder, and was hauling him back again.

“Let me go—let me go!” cried Cripps wildly. “I won’t be pestered with that devilish name any more. Let me go! I’ve found him in the river; he’s got the diamond necklace; he’s got the bank-notes; he’s frightened the Count and myself out of our senses; and I can’t have a quiet drink with a stranger, without hearing of him again. Let me go!”

“Stop a bit,” said Harry quickly, with his carelessness and reckless demeanour gone—“stop a bit! What do you know of Dandy Chater?”

“A great deal too much,” said the Doctor, shaking his head, and looking all about him. “What do you know about him?”

“I was his servant,” replied Harry, casting down his eyes, and speaking in a low voice. “And I—I betrayed him, and handed him over to the police.”

The little Doctor looked at Harry for some moments with great gravity, and then shook his head at him reproachfully. “My young friend—my dear young friend,”—he became quite melancholy over him—“it’s very evident to me that you are on the downward path—in the very devil’s clutches. You’ve been dreaming. Dandy Chater is as dead as Pharoah.”

“God forbid!” exclaimed Harry, turning very white. “What do you mean?”

“Dandy Chater was drowned—a week or two back—in that noble stream, the Thames.”

Harry burst into a roar of laughter. “A week or two back,” he exclaimed. “You must be out of your mind! Why, he’s been down here within these past few days—has been in Chelmsford Jail, to stand his trial for murder; and is now at large about the country somewhere—God be good to him, wherever he is—with the police hunting high and low for him.”

Cripps sat down suddenly on a bench. “Would you be so kind—so very kind, young man—as to call for a little drop of brandy—neat?” he said, in a shaky voice. “I’ve been persuading myself, for the last week, that I’d dreamed it all; and now I find that it’s all true.”

Harry called for the brandy and Cripps swallowed it, murmuring to himself, over and over again as he set down the empty glass—“Dandy Chater in the river—Dandy Chater got the necklace—Dandy Chater in Chelmsford Jail—Dandy Chater running about the country, with the police after him. And Ogledon said that he—”

He checked himself hurriedly there and got up. “You are a most estimable young man,” he said, addressing Harry—“and I would recommend you to drink as little as possible, and not to see more Dandy Chaters than you can help at once. Now, if you are going towards Bamberton, perhaps you’ll be good enough to put me on my road.”

Harry expressing his willingness to do so, the two went out of the inn together, and set off. For a long time, they walked in silence; but the Doctor’s mind was busy. Perhaps the mere fact of coming again in daylight among old well-remembered scenes jogged that blurred and faded thing, his memory; perhaps the sight, in the distance, of the towers of Chater Hall helped it still more. Whatever it may have been, he suddenly stopped in the road, just before they came to the village and clapped his hands together, with a cry; burst into a shriek of laughter; and began to dance and caper wildly about in the dust. Harry fully convinced, that the man had suddenly gone mad, backed away from him and stood ready to defend himself.

“Ho—ho—ho—!” screamed the Doctor, slapping his thighs, punching himself in the ribs, and still

dancing as wildly as ever—"here's a joke! Here's a business! Here's a topsy-turvy devilish upside-down affair! Ho—ho—ho—! It's the other child; it's the twin that was smuggled away!"

Harry, feeling at last that the man was serious, and that his disjointed remarks had a meaning which the other could not fathom, sprang at him, shook him, and demanded to know what he meant.

"Oh, you idiots!—you blunderers!" Cripps was still laughing boisterously. "Don't you see that there are two of them? One dead—t'other living!"

Further than that, he would say nothing; he still continued to dance about in the dust, and to clap his hands, and to shriek with laughter, and to shout, over and over again, that one was dead and t'other living. Harry, filled with repentance for the trouble he had brought upon his master, and keenly anxious to do all in his power to undo the wrong he felt he had committed, began to feel that this man might know something concerning Dandy Chater which would be useful—that he might be able, in some strange way, to save the man against whom that fearful charge of murder had been made. Looking at him, Harry began to wonder what to do; how to force from this man the information he probably held. Feeling his own weakness in the matter, he cast about in his mind to discover to whom he might turn for help.

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He must find, in the first place, a friend of the man he desired to assist—some one about whose loyalty to Dandy Chater there could be no faintest doubt. The name of one person after another occurred to him—only to be immediately rejected, as an avowed believer in his guilt, or as too weak to be of use. Suddenly there came the thought of Miss Barnshaw—the woman who loved Dandy Chater—who was rich, and had powerful friends; he decided to go to her at once, and to take Cripps with him.

To go to her was easy enough; to take the little man was another matter. For Cripps already began to repent of having said anything to a stranger, even in the natural excitement attending the discovery he felt he had made; on Harry suggesting, with much eagerness, that they should go together to see Miss Barnshaw, he at once became very grave again, and resolutely shook his head. Visions of Ogleton—of the body he had assisted to drag from the river—of many other things—floated before him; he decided to hold his tongue.

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Feeling, however, on second thoughts, that it might be possible that this young and rich lady would be willing to assist so forlorn an outcast, in need of considerable refreshment, he at length consented to accompany the lad to her house; and was hurried along, at a most undignified pace, by Harry, immediately his consent had been obtained.

Harry stipulated that he should first see the young lady alone, in order to prepare her for whatever communication Cripps might have to make; and that gentleman, complying with so reasonable a request, took a seat in the hall, while Harry was shown into the presence of Madge, who was alone.

There, his courage and resolution began to fail him at once—the more so, that she came eagerly towards him, with a flush on her face, and with her eyes lit up with a faint hope that he had news for her.

"What is it, Harry; what have you to tell me?" she asked, quickly.

"I want to be fair and just, Miss," he said; "I want to undo some of the wrong I have done, and have so bitterly repented of."

"What wrong?" she asked.

Harry hung his head a little lower. "I sold Master Dandy, Miss; I gave him up to the police, when he might have escaped; I put them on his track."

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"You! But I thought—"

"Oh yes, Miss," he said bitterly, glancing up at her—"I know what you thought; I know what every one thought. You believed that I loved him, and was devoted to him. So I was; I would have died for him; I would die now to undo what I did that night. But I was mad, Miss Barnshaw; I felt that he had done me a wrong, and I forgot—forgot all the rest. But now—now I want to put things right—to help him if I can—to prove his innocence."

"Yes—yes—he is innocent, Harry; there can be no question about that," she said firmly. "I believe that with all my heart."

"And so do I, Miss Barnshaw," replied the lad. "I feel now that he could never have struck down an unprotected girl—I know that, whatever mystery there may be about it all, the Master Dandy we know could never have done that deed. And there is a man here, Miss, a man I met by accident, who knows him, and who has some strange story to tell about him. I could make nothing of it myself, so I brought him here, in the hope that you would see him, Miss, and try to get the story from him. He has been babbling about twins—and there being two of them (two Dandy Chaters, he seemed to mean, Miss)—and one dead, and the other living."

She looked at him in perplexity for a moment, and then, following the direction of his eyes, and of a hasty movement he made towards the door, opened it swiftly, and looked into the hall. She beckoned to Cripps, who got up somewhat diffidently, and came into the room.

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He had had time to think about the matter while he sat alone in the hall. Having a deadly fear of Ogleton, and of his own connection with those shady characters at Woolwich, he had come to the conclusion that the less he said the better would it be for him. At the same time, he wanted money; and, if this woman wanted information, she must pay for it, no matter how meagre that information might be. Putting on an air of deep humility, he faced the girl, hat in hand, and waited for her to speak.

"I am told," she said at last, in a low voice, "that you have something to tell me, concerning Mr. Dandy Chater—something that may help him—perhaps save him from the fate which seems to be sweeping down upon him. Will you tell me what you know?"

Cripps moistened his lips with his tongue—looked all round the room—looked into his hat—and finally raised his eyes to her face. "Owing to circumstances I cannot explain, my dear young lady," he said, in his weak treble—"I run a very great risk in telling you anything; so great a risk that—I hardly know how to put the matter—that it will be necessary for you—or any one else—to make it worth my while to say anything."

"If you can help him—if you can tell me anything of service—you shall be paid liberally," she responded eagerly.

The weak eyes of the little man twinkled and he moistened his lips again. "I want—say fifty pounds?" he hazarded.

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"It is yours. Tell me what you know."

"I should like"—he hesitated, and turned his hat round and round—"I should like an open cheque—first."

She went straight to a desk in a corner of the room; was busy for a moment; and then looked round at him. "To whom shall I make it payable?" she asked.

"Cripps is my name—Dr. J. Cripps, if you please."

She brought him the piece of paper, and he read it greedily and thrust it in his pocket; seemed to hesitate a little longer; and finally said what he had made up his mind to say.

"My dear young lady—I am not usually sober enough to give a clear opinion upon anything; force of circumstances has kept me sober for nearly a week, and I am clearer about the head than usual. I can only say this: to the best of my knowledge and belief, there are two Dandy Chaters."

"Two!" she echoed, in a whisper.

"Two. One was fished out of the Thames some days ago, and has been buried as an unknown man; the other is in Chelmsford Jail—or wandering about the country—I don't know which. I only know that there are two of them."

"But—great heavens, man," she cried—"I have known one Dandy Chater since his boyhood; we have grown up side by side. What other man can there be in his likeness?"

"I don't care anything about that," said the Doctor, obstinately, "and I'm not going to tell you more. I know that there are two—that one is dead, and t'other living; that's all."

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"But, my good man—I implore you to relieve my anxiety. Can't you see my position? Which of these men is it who committed the murder of which the living one is accused; and which has been my friend—and my lover?"

The Doctor shook his head helplessly. "The Lord only knows," he said; "*I don't!*"

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OGLEDON PLAYS HIS LAST CARD

Philip Chater, after being tumbled so unceremoniously out of the fly, lost no time in scrambling to his feet, with the aid of Captain Quist and the man of the melancholy visage. He found some difficulty in getting up on his own account, by reason of the handcuffs which still adorned his wrists. The Captain, now that his first lament was over concerning the wonderful silk hat, picked up the wreckage of his headgear out of the dust, and became in a moment the resolute man of action.

"Phil, my lad," he said, briskly—"we 'aven't got a moment to throw away. At the rate that there 'oss is a goin', they'll be in Chelmsford, with the town roused, in about 'arf an hour; and then they'll begin ter scour the country, if yer like. Luckily it's dark, an' the moon ain't a showin' 'er face as much as she was; so we'll cut straight across these 'ere fields, an' lie close for a bit at the circus. Lor—wot a lucky thing it is that I took to 'osses an' sawdust!"

Philip was hurried along so rapidly, and assisted over stiles and through gates and hedges at such a pace, that he found it quite impossible to ask any questions. The Captain kept an arm tightly locked in his, as though he feared Philip might escape again, on his own account; while the melancholy man scouted in advance, on the lookout for possible surprises. In this order, after going at a great rate for some half hour or so, they came to a place where a few lights were gleaming among trees, and some shadowy figures moving to and fro. In the pale light of the moon, a huge tent stood up as a background to the picture, the front of which was occupied by one or two smaller tents, and a couple of caravans. Without stopping for anything, the Captain dived in amongst these, pulled open the door of one of the caravans, and motioned to Philip to go in.

The place was dimly lighted by a little oil lamp hung at one side; Philip recognised it, at the first glance, as the caravan in which he had escaped from Chelmsford. The Captain and the melancholy man following him in, the latter closed the door carefully, while the former produced from a little locker, various bottles and glasses with a smiling face.

"Not a word, Phil, my boy," said the Captain, in a hoarse whisper—"till sich time as you gets a drop of summink warmin' inside yer. You've 'ad sich an uncommonly lively time lately, an' 'ave bin tumbled about to that extent, as it's a marvel ter me if you 'ave any system left at all. So down with it, Phil, my lad—with the noble sentiment—(I feels like a boy-pirate meself!)—'Confusion to the perlice!"

"I am more grateful to you, old friend, than I can say," said Philip, "and, if I can get these bracelets off, I shall be able to drink, or to do anything else with greater ease. However, I'll drink to the toast with all my heart." He raised the glass in both his manacled hands, with a laugh.

"We'll 'ave them little ornyments orf in 'arf a jiffy," said the Captain, diving into the locker again. "We guessed you might 'ave summink of that sort, as a little delicate attention from your friends—so we got pervided accordin'. 'Ere's a file from our 'andy-man's tool-bag; an' I reckon I'd best 'ave a go at the rivets."

The Captain set to work at once; nor would he utter a word, in reply to any questions, until the handcuffs were removed. It took some considerable time, and while the filing went on, Philip noticed that the melancholy man kept his eyes fixed upon the floor—only occasionally indulging in that extraordinary cough, with which he had been afflicted at the Chater Arms.

At last, the handcuffs being safely put out of sight, the Captain, turning to the melancholy man, said abruptly—"Now then, Skerritt, my boy—let's know 'ow this 'ere affair was brought orf for the infermation of Mr. Chater. This, Phil," he added, "is a man as is to be trusted with anythink—from untold gold to w'iskey—a man as formerly sailed under me, an' 'as joined me, as a sort of depitty clown. I'll own," added the Captain, in a hoarse whisper behind his hand to Philip—"I'll own as 'e don't look it—but 'e's got a way with 'im, w'en 'e's painted up, as would fairly astonish yer."

Mr. Skerritt immediately plunged into an account of his doings, and of how he contrived to meet Philip; explaining it all with many of those curious sounds before referred to, and with much rolling of one melancholy eye. He had a curious funereal voice, as though it had sunk below the usual level at some period, of great depression, and had never been got up again.

"The Cap'n 'avin' passed the word as there were a shipmate in distress, I started out fer ter sight 'im; got wind that 'e might be expected in Bamberton—wind an' tide bein', so ter speak, favourable. The Cap'n 'ere come as far as the cross-roads wi' me an' we arranged signals. Then I 'eard a fair rumpus in the village, an' got up jus' in time to see the perliceman a bein' pounded in the ribs by a ole gent in his stockin' feet, an' Mr. Chater a layin' about proper among the lubbers as was a tryin' to 'old 'im. I shoves meself for'ard, an' manages ter git with 'im an' the perliceman, w'en they starts fer Chelmsford. The rest 'e knows." Here Mr. Skerritt laughed again, in that peculiar fashion of his, and looked more melancholy than ever.

"But, Captain," urged Philip—"you don't seem to realise what a risk you run, in thus defying the Law, and befriending a man who is an outlaw. My debt to you is greater than I can pay; and I cannot permit you to run any further danger on my account."

"'Old 'ard—'old 'ard, mess-mate," cried the Captain. "'Osses or no 'osses—circuses or no circuses—I stan' by a friend. I confess I don't understan' the business—an' I don't like you a runnin' under false colours; but you've give me yer word as 'ow you're innocent; an' I'll continue for to rescue yer, once a week, if necessary—till further orders. I don't take no notice of objections or risks; rescue yer I

will, agin yer will or with it. An' now, Phil, as we starts early to-morrer mornin', I'd advise yer to turn in, an' git wot sleep yer can. An' in order that yer may sleep with a easy mind, there's some one as I'd like yer ter see, afore I battens yer down for the night."

So saying, the worthy Captain opened the door cautiously, and crept down the steps. In a few moments, the door was opened again, by another hand; and a light figure darted in, and fell at Philip's feet. It was Clara Siggs.

He was so astonished and so delighted at this unexpected meeting, that, as he raised her from the floor, and looked into her eyes, he bent his head, and kissed her, quite on an impulse.

"My dear girl," he said—"this is the best part of all—to know that you are safe and well, and in good hands. Tell me—how did you come here?"

"Mrs. Quist, with whom I lodged at Chelmsford, gave up her house, and came to join the Captain. She has made up her mind to travel about in future with her husband—to look after him a little, I fancy"—Clara laughed softly as she spoke—"and so I came with her."

"I saw your mother a few hours since," said Philip, watching the girl intently as he spoke—"and assured her that you were with friends, and well cared for. When will you return to her?"

She looked up at him quickly for a moment, with a half reproachful expression on her face. "When you tell me to go," she said, slowly.

"No—not when *I* tell you, child; but when your own heart tells you. I wouldn't have you think me ungrateful, for the world; I wouldn't have you think that I undervalue, in any way, your sacrifice for me, or your valuable help in my time of greatest need; I shall remember it all, while God gives me memory to remember anything. But I should be a brute and a coward, if I took advantage of it—or of you. You are very young, and have, I trust, a long and happy life before you; my life seems to be going down in shadows. More than all else, I want you to think that the Dandy Chater who lingered with you in the woods, and whispered foolish things to you, is not the Dandy Chater who holds your hands now, and speaks to you out of a full and grateful heart. Perhaps—who can tell, child?—perhaps trouble and suffering have altered him—have made him see many things in a better light; perhaps he's a different man altogether."

She was weeping quietly, with her head bowed down on the hands he held; but she did not interrupt him.

"There's an old mother at home, waiting to welcome back the pretty child she brought into the world, and has held so often in her arms; there's a grey-headed father, who loves you; and there's some one else—a good-hearted lad, with never a stain upon him—who loves you, too, as you deserve to be loved. Now—when does your heart tell you you must go back to them?"

"I—I understand," she said, almost in a whisper. "I've had time to think, during these few days—and this wild and foolish heart of mine seems to beat for them—for him—more than it ever did before. I should like to go back to them at once—to-morrow—now that I know you are safe. But will they understand?"

"Your mother will understand everything," said Philip, with a smile.

For three days, Philip Chater remained with the circus—keeping hidden during the day, and only venturing out at night. During that time, he had some narrow escapes from re-capture; once, he lay under a tarpaulin which had been flung hurriedly over him, and heard a constable making minute enquiries concerning the missing Dandy Chater, while Captain Peter Quist gave as minute replies. Realising, however, that he could not remain hidden much longer, and being fully aware of the risk which was run so cheerfully by the Captain, and those associated with him, he determined to get away, and to let what risk and danger there was be upon his own shoulders.

He knew well, however, that the Captain would never consent to his departure; and would be mortally offended at the mere suggestion of such a thing. Therefore, he determined to steal away, without giving any warning of his intention. Clara Siggs, under a safe escort, had gone back to Bamberton; and the circus was already making arrangements to move on further afield.

Accordingly, quite late at night, when all the people connected with the circus were sleeping, he started to make his escape. He had absolutely refused to occupy the caravan originally intended for him, because he knew that, by so doing, the Captain and Mrs. Quist would be rendered practically homeless; after much contention about the matter, it had been arranged that he should sleep in a rough tent, and in the company of the melancholy one. And, on this night, he lay wide awake in the darkness, listening to the heavy breathing of that gentleman, and striving to make up his mind what course to pursue, when once he should be clear of the little encampment.

Fortunately, the melancholy man was a heavy sleeper, and Philip was able to creep past him, and get out of the tent, under the stars, without rousing him or any one else. Standing there, in the silence of the night, with only those faint points of light glimmering and winking above him, and no sound all about, save the distant barking of a dog, Philip wondered what he should do—to what point of the compass he should turn. So far as he knew, he stood absolutely alone, with all his battles still to fight. But even now, with a full knowledge of the dangers through which he had passed, and the dangers he had still to face, Bamberton—the scene of all his troubles—drew him like a magnet.

The circus had moved on, some fifteen miles to the westward of the village; but Philip had kept careful note of the route taken, and was able to set out at once, by the most direct road. There was but small fear of his meeting any one, in the middle of the night; but, for all that, he was watchful and suspicious of every sound.

He made straight for the Chater Arms, and reached it at about five o'clock in the morning; lying concealed at a little distance, he waited until he saw Betty herself throw open her window, and show her blooming face to the fresh morning sun; creeping near, he signalled to her, and in a few moments she appeared at the door leading into the yard, and beckoned to him.

Before a word was spoken, she drew him inside, and hugged him in her hearty fashion, and wept a little in quite a womanly one.

"Clara is with you?" was his first question.

"Yes—an' as well as well. But, my dear boy, wot brings yer back to Bamberton?"

Philip hurriedly explained his reasons for leaving Captain Quist—reasons which Betty cordially approved.

"You won't need to worry yerself a bit, deary," she said—"cos that there idjut Tokely 'as took 'isself back to Scotland Yard—an' there ain't nobody in the 'ouse, 'cept a drunken little wretch wot seems to 'ave plenty of money, an' is goin' on in a fair way to empty my bar. An' of all the strange things"—she stopped suddenly, and looked at Philip, and clapped her hands together; "Phil, dear lad,—to think that you an' 'im should 'ave come together, at this time, in this place, an' with ole Betty under the same roof!"

Philip stared at her in astonishment. "Why, little mother"—he said, laughing—"what on earth are you rambling on about?"

"Not ramblin' at all, deary—but jus' speakin' of plain honest facts. The man who's sleepin' upstairs now is a chap—a Doctor—by the name of Cripps—"

"Not the Cripps of whom you told me, Betty!" cried Philip, excitedly. "Not the man who was paid to keep the secret of my birth?"

"The very same," cried Betty, with equal excitement. "Why—Phil, dear lad—"

"Don't waste a moment, Betty," he cried—"I must see this man at once."

"But 'e's in bed—an' sleepin' like a pig; it took Toby an' another man to get 'im upstairs las' night—an' 'e fought all the way."

"I don't care if he's in bed—or where he is," said Philip—"I must see him."

Persuaded at last that the matter was really urgent, Betty led the way upstairs—pointed to a door—and hurriedly retired. Philip Chater, after knocking once, and getting no response, turned the handle and went in.

Dr. Cripps must have gone to bed, as suggested by Betty Siggs, in a state of considerable excitement. His dilapidated clothing was literally all over the room, as though he had stripped it from his person, and hurled it in all directions. He was hanging half out of bed, as though he had made a vain attempt to stand on his head on the floor, and had fallen asleep before accomplishing it; so that his countenance, at all times an inflamed one, was literally purple. Philip, in his impatience, hurried towards him, shook him into an upright position, and spoke his name.

The unfortunate Cripps, awakened thus hurriedly from his slumbers, and having no time to collect his thoughts properly, saw before him the man who had been the cause of all his miseries and troubles, and remembered nothing of that solution of the mystery at which he had so opportunely arrived. Indeed, the fifty pounds he had earned—or obtained—from Madge Barnshaw was going far to make him a greater wreck than before; for he was melting it into a liquid form, as rapidly as mortal man could.

Staring, in those first moments of semi-consciousness, into the eyes of Dandy Chater, as he supposed, he beat him off with both hands, shrieked aloud, and made for the window. Philip had only just time to catch him round the waist; in another moment, he would have gone head first into the yard below.

"Steady, my friend—steady!" exclaimed Philip, putting the terror-stricken man into a chair, and getting between him and the window. "What are you frightened at? What's the matter?"

Cripps looked at him for a moment or two, and then his face gradually changed. "You came—came on a man so suddenly," he said. "But I see now; I suppose you're the other one."

Philip laughed. "Yes," he said—"I'm the other one. You know all about me, Cripps; you know that I'm a fugitive from justice—and you know, better than any one, that I am innocent, and am suffering for my brother's sins. I suppose you know that he is dead?"

Cripps nodded. "Fished him out of the river myself, with a beastly sailor-man, who dragged me into it by sheer brute force," he replied. "And, ever since then, you've been appearing to me as a ghost—and frightening me out of what few wits I have left. Now—what are you going to do?"

"First," said Philip, sitting down near him—"I want to assure you that I am your friend; I want to plead with you to help me—to work with me to bring this business to an end. Who knows the real story, except yourself?"

"No one," said Cripps after a moment's thought—"except the woman who took you to Australia."

"And she will say nothing, I know," replied Philip. "Now there is a man—a cousin of mine—named Ogledon—"

Cripps shook a feeble fist in the air. "Ogledon is a scoundrel—a devil," he cried. "Ask him how Dandy Chater—your brother, mind you—met his death?"

"If you know anything of that, Dr. Cripps—in mercy tell me!" exclaimed Philip.

"Ogledon killed him; that much I know, from his own lips," said the little man, after a pause. "You see, you have taken his place so neatly, that it has never occurred to anybody to imagine that Dandy is dead. I was always sorry for Dandy—oh—don't laugh at me; I'm a drunken little creature, of no good to any one—but Dandy would have been all right, if it hadn't have been for Ogledon. Ogledon took him, when he was a mere lad, and moulded him as he would. And then killed him to finish it. But there's worse than that."

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"Worse!" cried Philip. "What do you mean? What can be worse than that?"

"Do you know a young girl named Marnham? No—Barnham—Barn——"

"Barnshaw?" asked Philip, with his heart beginning to beat uncomfortably fast.

"Barnshaw it is. Lives at a house near here. Well—Ogledon's been sweet on her for a long time, although, from what I hear, she would have nothing to say to him."

"Heaven bless her! I should think not, indeed!"

"Well—Ogledon made up his mind to get hold of her; he has sent her an urgent message to go to him, on the plea that he can explain about you."

"About me?" said Philip, in astonishment.

"Yes—or rather about Dandy Chater. That was the message: 'I can tell you the truth about Dandy Chater.' At least, so the Shady 'un told me."

"The Shady 'un? What has he to do with it?"

"Everything. He has been trusted by Ogledon with the message; I saw him this very afternoon, when he came in here to enquire the way—having missed it somehow or other. And Miss Barnshaw has gone back with him."

Philip Chater drew a deep breath. "Steady now, Cripps; let's have this thing straight. You say the Shady 'un has taken Miss Barnshaw to Ogledon. Where is Ogledon? Where are they to meet?"

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"At a hut on the river bank, near The Three Watermen," replied Cripps.

"Where Dandy Chater met his death!" muttered Philip to himself. "Cripps, get into your clothes; we'll follow them at once!"

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DANDY CHATER COMES FROM THE GRAVE

Dr. Cripps—partly from excitement, partly from sheer vindictiveness against Ogledon—was only too ready for the expedition. Indeed, both men were so eager for it, though each for a different reason, that Philip almost forgot the caution that was necessary, in his own case; he would have started off, in broad daylight that very hour, to track down the man of whom he was in search, had not Cripps pointed out to him the madness of such a course.

“You see, my dear Chater,” he said—“you’ll get me into trouble, as well as yourself; it’s a dangerous thing to be running about the country with a notorious criminal—I beg that you will excuse the expression; but you really are a bit notorious, you know—and I have no wish to appear in the dock, for anything beyond my own private sins—and they are heavy enough, Heaven knows. So that, if I might suggest, I think it would be wiser for us to smuggle you to London, in some way or other—that is, if you are really resolved on going.”

“Of course I am resolved,” cried Philip, eagerly; “nothing shall turn me back. Cripps, I won’t believe you are so bad as men have painted you, or made you—or as you have made yourself. There’s a heart in you somewhere, and all the brandy in the world hasn’t washed it out of you.”

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“Thank you,” said Cripps, in a low voice; and hung his head.

“Let me tell you this; that I love this girl with all my heart and soul; she is in danger—and I know that Ogledon will not hesitate to add another crime to his list. The question is (for you are right about the necessity for smuggling me) how am I to get to London?”

They decided to consult Betty Siggs forthwith; and, although that lady was at first very chary of holding any communication with Cripps, she cheerfully accepted Philip’s assurance that the little man was to be trusted, and set about devising a plan to help them. Taking Toby into her confidence, also, she brought him up to the room, where Philip and Cripps were waiting, and they put the case before him.

Toby Siggs thought about it for a long time; turned it over this way and that, but could make nothing of it. Betty, after all, settled the difficulty in her own quick fashion.

She happened to be standing near the window, looking down into the yard at the back of the inn; when she suddenly clapped her hands, and laughed aloud. “‘Ere you are!” she exclaimed—“the very thing!”

Philip ran to her side, and looked down into the yard. A heavy wagon, laden with hay, had drawn into the yard, and the carter was at that moment climbing down, ready to enter the house.

“See, dear lad,” whispered Betty—“the man is a stranger, and ‘alf a sov’rin will be a fortune to ‘im, an’ ‘e’ll ask no questions. You ain’t above roughing it—an’ you an’ the other man can creep in under the tarpaulin, and get to town, without no one bein’ any the wiser. It’ll be slow—but it’ll be better than bein’ caught ‘arf-way, an’ ‘avin’ yer journey for nothin’—won’t it?”

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The plan seemed an excellent one; and Betty went downstairs at once to arrange it. The carter, being an easy fellow, earning small wages, was delighted at the prospect of gathering in ten shillings with so little trouble; and, in half an hour Cripps and Philip Chater were lying snugly on top of the sweet-smelling hay, under the tarpaulin, travelling slowly but surely on the road to London.

Cripps was very valiant—in whispers—on the road; professing his ability to run Ogledon to earth, and openly charge him with the murder of Dandy Chater. Repentance was strong upon him for the time, and he was ready to perform impossible deeds, by way of reparation for past misdeeds. In particular, he was anxious about the bank notes which had been handed to Philip at The Three Watermen.

“For of course I know, by this time, Mr. Chater, that they were handed to you,” he said—“and not to the man who is dead. Let me warn you, for your own sake, not to deal in them; they are stopped, and keenly watched for already.”

“The warning comes too late,” replied Philip, with a groan. “I dealt in them almost at once. I had to cover up a—well, call it a mistake—on the part of my late brother, and I paid away the notes as hush-money.”

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“To whom did you pay it?”

“To a money-lender—a man bearing the distinctive name of Isaacson,” replied Philip.

“That sounds bad,” said the little man. “He would be sure to find out about the notes before any one. Have you heard nothing from him?”

“How should I? I have not been to Chater Hall since that time; Heaven knows how many letters may be waiting for me—or for Dandy Chater. At all events, it’s no use worrying about it, or wondering what is going to happen within the next twenty-four hours.”

The cart in which they travelled was heavily laden, and slow; and the carter stopped many times upon the road, on the strength of the ten shillings he had received, for refreshment. They chafed at the delay, but could do nothing; for they dared not express impatience, for fear of arousing suspicion. Worse than all, from the Doctor’s standpoint, at least, it was impossible for them to stir from under the tarpaulin, or to show themselves; so that, through the dust and heat of many hours,

they had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing the carter bury his face in huge tankards of ale, whilst nothing came their way. At such moments as these, the Doctor buried *his* face in the hay, and positively groaned aloud.

It was quite late in the afternoon, when they came into London, and the cart was hacked into a huge stable-yard. There, another delay occurred; for night was still far off, and they dared not stir in daylight. Fortunately, the hay was not to be disturbed until the next morning, so that they lay there, listening to the busy noise of the streets, and longing for darkness.

Dusk at last, and the noises in the streets growing fainter. They had agreed upon their plan of action, and had decided to take a four-wheeled cab to Woolwich—choosing that conveyance, as being likely to attract less attention than a hansom—and then to walk to The Three Watermen. They slipped down the side of the hay wagon, and crept out of the stable-yard into the streets.

Philip dived into the first crawling “growler” he saw, leaving Cripps to give the necessary directions. Philip leaned back in the cab, as much out of sight as possible, and began to wonder, with fiery impatience, whether they would be too late—or whether they would miss those of whom they were in pursuit—or whether Madge had really come to London, and, if so, where she was at that time.

After a long journey through endless streets, Cripps stopped the vehicle, and they alighted. Philip found himself at the corner of a narrow and very dirty street, in a neighbourhood evidently of the poorest class—and yet a neighbourhood which seemed familiar.

“Now, Mr. Chater,” said the little man, who was evidently growing more nervous at every step they took—“Now comes the necessity for greater caution than ever. We—we may absolutely ruin everything, if we are too precipitate. We must find out first where Ogleton is, and whether or not he has gone to the hut spoken of by the Shady ‘un. Ah—you don’t know what Ogleton is—or what he is capable of.”

“I can guess,” said Philip, quietly—“and that makes me the more anxious to get on without delay. How far are we from the place?”

“A hundred yards or so,” replied Cripps, who was beginning to tremble like a leaf. “You don’t—don’t feel that you would like—like to turn back, I suppose?”

“Turn back!” cried Philip with a grim laugh. “Turn back now—when I am within touch of this man! No—not if greater dangers than any I have met yet fronted me. Show me the way, wherever it may be!”

The Doctor led the way down a side street, which brought them, with another sharp turn to the left to The Three Watermen; Philip knew it in a moment.

“I know the way now,” he said—“I have been to the spot before. Come on—let us waste no further time.”

In his eagerness, he dived himself into that small alley-way, into which he had gone on that first night of his coming to the place. Only when he reached the end of it, did he look round for his companion; but Cripps was gone. His fears had been too much for him, and, watching his opportunity, he had fled. There was no time to wait for him, or to look for him; Philip made his way rapidly in the direction of those tumble-down out-houses he had noticed on the night he found his brother’s body.

Coming within sight of these, he suddenly stopped, and dropped down behind the shelter of a ruined boat, which lay half buried in the mud. For, at the door of one of those dilapidated buildings, stood the Shady ‘un, as if on guard.

Probably Mr. Shadrach Nottidge had never been so surprised or terrified in all his life, as he was when a figure suddenly sprang up before him, and he felt himself caught by the throat, with a grip which threatened to choke him with the least possible delay. And, when he looked into the eyes of Philip Chater, and remembered how much cause that gentleman had for wreaking vengeance upon him, by reason of the treachery he had displayed in handing him over to the police, his fears were increased a thousand-fold.

“Now—you sly sneaking villain,” whispered Philip between his teeth—“you runner and crawler for other rogues—where’s your master?”

The Shady ‘un, wholly unable to speak, by reason of that grip upon his throat, faintly moved his head in the direction of the hut.

“Is the lady you brought here with him?” asked Philip, in the same cautious voice.

The Shady ‘un contrived to nod, and to screw his head again in the direction of the door; Philip, glancing at it, saw that it stood some two inches open. Giving the Shady ‘un one final squeeze and shake, he flung him away, so that he fell on his back on the mud—gently pushed open the door—and crept in. The Shady ‘un, the instant that Philip had disappeared into the hut, got slowly to his feet, and then scurried away in the darkness towards the streets.

Inside the hut, Philip found himself in a maze of poles, and ropes, and planks, and dusty tattered sails; gliding among these—(the shed had evidently belonged to a boat-builder, and had long been abandoned)—he peered past them into the shed itself, where a faint light glimmered.

As his eyes became accustomed to the twilight of the place, he saw that the light in it came from a guttering candle, thrust into the neck of a bottle, and stood upon a table. Near this table, and at the further end of the room, stood Madge Barnshaw. At the side of it nearest to where Philip stood concealed, and with his back towards the door, stood Ogleton. With his hands clasped behind his

back, and his head thrust forward towards the girl, he seemed to menace her, even while he was silent. And yet, though he seemed to have her at his mercy, he had about him a dogged air of being at bay himself, and desperate. From the first words Philip heard, as he stood there in the darkness watching them, it appeared that Madge had only just reached the place, and was still ignorant of the full extent of her own danger.

"You sent for me in desperate haste, Mr. Ogledon," she said—"to tell me about Dandy Chater—to tell me the truth about him."

"Yes—I'll tell you all the truth about Dandy Chater," he said, sneeringly.

"I have taken a long journey, in the full hope that you might help him—that you might show me a way to prove his innocence, and set him free," she said, in the same earnest pleading voice. "If you can do that—if you will help him—I will bless you from the depths of my grateful heart; I will believe that you are true and kind and generous; and I will beg you to forget any harsh thing I may ever have said to you."

He moved nearer to the table, and leant his hands upon it, and looked at her across the flickering candle-light. "I have read somewhere," he said, slowly—"in some book made for babes and sucklings—that the love of a woman will make an angel of a man—and raise him up, and exalt him. It's a lie; no such thing ever happened. So far as I have loved, the love of a woman is a thing wherein are bound up hatred and bitterness and murder—and every devil-made thing that belongs to the darkness. They talk of a woman scorned; what think you of a man scorned? What think you of a man, who—eating his heart out for one smile—one word of tenderness from a mere slip of a girl—is met by looks which show him only disgust and repugnance? You thought it a fine thing to fling aside the love of a man like myself, and take up with a mere boy—didn't you?"

"I never flung aside your love," replied the girl, scornfully. "I told you, from the first, that I could not care for you—that I loved some one else. Had you been a gentleman—even a man——"

"A gentleman!" he sneered. "What has gentility to do with this business? It's a question between a man and a woman—and you shall find that the man wins. Oh—my pretty maid—I swore a long time ago that no other man should stand between you and myself; I swore that I would have you, and would bend you as it pleased me—or break you. Yes—you've roused a lurking devil in me—and I'll stick at nothing now. First—let us understand each other, in regard to Dandy Chater."

He took a turn or two about the room, with his head bent, as though undecided what to say, or what to leave unsaid. At last, going to his former position near the table and standing there, he began to say what he had to say.

"You loved Dandy Chater—oh—don't interrupt me; you would say you love him still, I suppose?—I knew that, from your own lips, as well as from what I saw and heard when you were together. I wonder if you would love him now—if you could see him?"

"I don't understand you," she said, in a low voice. "Why should I not?"

"Because—well because he wouldn't look nice," he responded, with a grim laugh. "In a word—because he's dead."

Through the mind of the girl there floated the words the little man who had accompanied Harry had spoken—"One is dead—the other living!" But she said nothing; she was almost afraid to speak, because she wanted so desperately to hear what he had to say in explanation of that mystery.

"Yes—he's dead. He stood in my way—blocked up the path which led to my desires. More than that, I had made a tool of him for years—had used him for every mean and petty thing I did not care to soil my own hands with. He might have told tales. Do you know what I did with him?"

She looked at him with a face of horror, and slowly shook her head.

"Look round these walls—look at this miserable place in which you stand. It should have a value in your eyes; for it has heard his death scream. Within a dozen yards of it, on the bank of this river—at night—I struck him down. And I'd strike him down again to-night, if he stood alive before me. And you—you thought to defy a man who felt the killing of that puny lover of yours no more than he would have felt the killing of a rat!"

He had felt it, though—and he felt it still; or why did his hands tremble in their grip of the table, and why did he glance for a moment, with that blanched face, behind him?

She, too, began to fear him now, as she had not feared him before; looked about her wildly, as if for a way of escape.

"Ah—you shake and tremble now—do you?" he said, mockingly. "You'll tremble more when you know what I intend to do. Think of it. You're here, far away from any houses, and you may scream your heart out, and no one will hear you. Whatever love I felt for you has gone—turned into a viler thing. By God—pretty Miss Innocence"—he brought his fist down heavily on the table—"you shall dally with me an hour or two—for the first and last time; and then go join your lover in the river!"

He darted round the table towards her; but she evaded him, screaming, and made straight towards where Philip stood. Ogledon, in his mad rush, tripped and fell; and, at the same moment, Philip caught the girl, swung her round into the darkness where he had been standing, and stepped out into the light.

It was all done so rapidly, that Ogledon was on his feet, and had actually come on, with a blind rush, before he saw who stood in his path; and even then, he had no time to stop himself—scarcely time even to cry out. In a moment, Philip had him by the throat, and had forced him to his knees; bending over him, and looking full into his ghastly face, he spoke the first words that rose to his

lips; re-assumed, for a moment, that character he had taken upon himself near that very spot but a week or two before.

“Dandy Chater is dead—is he? Struck down by your hand from behind in the dark—murderer! Do you look into his eyes now—in this place where you killed him—or will you still cry that Dandy Chater has not come back from the grave?”

The face into which Philip Chater looked, suddenly changed horribly; mouthed and chattered at him, in some unearthly tongue; and the head fell backwards. He felt the body relax, and droop under his hands; heard a sort of gasping cry; and then it slid out of his grasp to the floor. At the same moment, the door was flung open, and the place seemed full of people.

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In the front of them were some constables—and, just behind them, the face of the Shady 'un. Philip had a dim idea that Madge had come out into the light, and was bending over the prostrate form of Ogledon. He knew, too, that handcuffs were on his wrists, and that he was strongly held by a couple of men. Some others had gone to Ogledon, and were raising him up.

“Yes—take me,” he cried, recklessly; “I don't mind now; my innocence is proved. Look to that man”—he pointed towards Ogledon—“he knows my story; he is my chief witness!”

One of the men, who had been bending over Ogledon, got up and adjusted his chin-strap, and looked at Philip curiously.

“I'm afraid your witness won't do you much good,” he said, shortly. “The man is dead!”

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A RACE FOR A LIFE

The Shady 'un, in the vindictiveness of his temper, had a word or two to say to the stricken man, before he was marched off.

"You're the bloke wot took 'old of me by the windpipe—ain't yer?" he said, going close up to Philip, and thrusting his face forward at him. "Let this 'ere be a warnin' to yer not ter tike 'old of other chap's windpipes in futur'. You've done me rather a good turn—you 'ave, Mister Dandy Chater; there was a 'underd pound a 'angin' to you—for sich infermation as would lead to you bein' nabbed—an' that 'underd pound is mine. I calls all these 'ere gents to witness," he cried, raising his voice, and looking round about him—"as I brought yer all to this place, an' nabbed 'im meself. An' I'm a goin' ter stick to these 'ere noble coppers, till I gits my 'underd pound!"

Before Philip was marched away, he turned towards Madge—who stood with her face buried in her hands—and made one last appeal to her.

"Dear girl," he said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper—"there is but one way to save me now—but one hope left for me. Before God I am innocent. Find Dr. Cripps!"

There was no time to say more; they took him off at once—meeting, at the very door of the place, the doctor who had been sent for to examine the dead man. Madge followed the little party out, and saw Philip placed in a cab, with three constables inside and another on the box—and driven off; the Shady 'un—still in pursuit of his "'underd pound"—running after the cab, as if his very life depended on keeping it in sight.

In the stress of the moment Madge Barnshaw had lost all idea of time or place—indeed of everything. She quite forgot in what neighbourhood she stood or at what hour; and was only roused by hearing a voice address her.

"I asks yer pardon, young lady—for a speakin' of sich a trim built craft, without leave—but this ain't no place for you to be a standin' about alone in. If so be as you've lost yer way, put yer faith in a old mariner as knows the points of Life's compass a bit, an' let 'im tow yer into wotever 'arbour you may be bound for."

This extraordinary speech was delivered at such a rapid rate, and in so hoarse a whisper that Madge had no time to interpose a word, or to check the flow of words. Moreover, on looking at the face of the speaker, whatever indignation she might have been disposed to feel melted away; for it was a good kind honest face—ruddy with much exposure to wind and weather, and fringed with a luxuriant growth of tangled hair.

"My lass—I'm a married man—(an' well I knows it, w'en Mrs. Quist ain't got 'er temper ironed out straight!)—and there ain't no 'arm in me. But there's a few craft of a queer rig in these waters—and you'll do well not to stay in 'em."

Madge made up her mind at once to trust him; explained briefly that she knew nothing of the neighbourhood, and had merely come there to keep an appointment. And then, without more ado, she suddenly turned round—made a frantic effort to stand upright—and dropped into the man's arms. The scenes through which she had passed so recently had utterly unnerved her, and Miss Madge Barnshaw was lying in a dead faint in the arms of Captain Peter Quist.

The Captain's first thought was to shout for help; his next, to carry the girl to some place where he could procure something which would revive her. Glancing about him eagerly, he caught sight of the lighted windows of The Three Watermen; and, without a moment's delay, half carried and half supported her through the door, and into the little private bar.

Only one person happened to be in that bar at the time—a little man, seated in a corner, half asleep, with a glass of spirits beside him. The Captain, entering hurriedly with his burden, looked round, and cried out—"Give me some brandy—quick! an' tell me w'ere I can find a doctor."

At the mention of that last word, the little man in the corner staggered to his feet; swayed uneasily for a moment; and then came towards the Captain, with what dignity he could muster on such short notice. But his eyes no sooner fell upon the Captain, and then upon the girl, than he uttered a sort of cry—spun completely round like an unsteady top—and made for the door. But the Captain had recognised him, too; and caught him just as he was slipping out.

"'Ere 'old 'ard, mess-mate—'old 'ard," exclaimed the Captain, who had deposited his burden on a bench and was able to give, for the moment, his undivided attention to his captive. "You're a man as I wants to see, in 'arf a shake, so soon as I've attended to this 'ere young lady. An' per'aps, as there don't seem to be nobody else 'andy—p'raps you can tell me w'ere I'll find a doctor?"

The little man—no other than Dr. Cripps—was cowed by the superior size and strength of the Captain and capitulated. "I—I am a doctor," he said, giving himself a sort of shake, probably with the object of pulling himself together—and bending over Madge, who had begun to open her eyes, and to look about her. "Ah—nothing more than a temporary faintness, as I imagined."

He turned round suddenly, and went to the bar, and hammered on it with his fists, and shouted out in a voice sufficient to be heard at the other end of the house. "Hi—hi—why the devil don't you look after business, all of you! Here's brandy wanted—and all sorts of things—and yet any one might die, and be buried forty times over, before you'd turn a hair. Hi—hi—where are you all?"

A surly-looking man came slowly out of an inner room, and advanced to the bar. "All right—all right

—you needn't shout the 'ouse down, Dr. Cripps," he said, stooping to get what was wanted, and glancing carelessly at the girl as he did so.

But it happened that the brandy was not required; for the mere mention of the name of Cripps was sufficient to rouse Madge, as nothing else could have done. She sprang up at once, and caught the little man by the shoulders, and looked into his eyes. Cripps, for his part, began to shake and to tremble very much; for he remembered the fifty pounds she had paid him, and wondered whether or not she wanted it back.

"Are you Dr. Cripps?" she asked, staring at him intently. "Yes—I see you are. What Providence has sent you to me at this time!"

"Madam," said the Doctor, feebly, "if it would be any use for me to deny my own identity I would most willingly do so. I have been hunted and badgered to an extent beyond all belief; I have been dragged about in the dead of night—sworn at—carried miles on hay waggons, without a chance of obtaining natural and necessary refreshments; and all because my name happens to be Cripps. But I give in, Madam; I am vanquished; do what you will with me—but let me finish my liquor." He walked across to where his glass stood, and drained it, and then looked expressively at the Captain. But nothing came of that; and at last beginning dimly to see, in the coming of these two people—each connected, in such a different fashion, with his recollections of Dandy Chater—something which he had to face, whispered the landlord over the bar for a moment, and then turned again to them.

"If you want me—if you have anything private to say," he said—"you had better come upstairs; there is a room there, of which I can claim the use."

"And in which you an' me met some little time back," said the Captain, nudging him.

Cripps led the way upstairs, and ushered them into the same room in which the meeting had been held not so long before. Carefully shutting the door, he motioned to them to be seated, and stood looking at them curiously, and waiting for them to speak.

"A day or two since," began Madge, speaking with much eagerness, and looking straight at the Doctor, "I paid you a large sum for certain information concerning Mr. Dandy Chater——"

"Ullo!" broke in the Captain, staring from one to the other. "I asks yer pardon, Miss—but I 'adn't no idea, w'en I took yer in tow, as you was acquainted with my ole friend Phil."

She looked at him in perplexity. "Nor am I," she said slowly. "I spoke of Mr. Dandy Chater, who has been recaptured, and is to stand his trial to-morrow for murder."

"Dandy Chater is the false flag as 'e's bin a sailin' under," replied the Captain. "But, anyways—call 'im Dandy Chater, or Phil Crowdy—or Phil Chater—'e's my pal, and I'm beatin' up these 'ere quarters for to find 'im."

Again there flashed through Madge's mind the words the Doctor had spoken, about the one man living, and the other dead; again there seemed to ring in her ears the words of Ogledon, when he had confessed to her that he had killed Dandy Chater. Yet that same Dandy Chater had stood—alive and well—in the hut by the river; that same Dandy Chater was now on his way to Chelmsford Jail!

"He said to-night," she said, turning to Cripps—"that I must find you—that you could save him. I have heard that the trial will be held to-morrow. Won't you help me; won't you tell me something more than you told the other day? Think in what a state of mind I am now left! The one man has been murdered; the other, of whom you spoke, is either Dandy Chater, or a total stranger to me. How am I to find out?"

The Doctor opened his mouth to speak, but the Captain suddenly raised his hand, and checked him. "Avast!" he said hoarsely—"I've got the bearings of this 'ere business—an' I've got it from Phil 'isself. An' if so be as this 'ere young lady 'll bear with me, she shall 'ave the straight of it. Dandy Chater—own twin brother to my pal Philip Crowdy, or Philip Chater—was took out of the river by this 'ere gent an' myself a while back. I 'ad my reasons fer sayin' nothink, an' I cut an' run."

"I, too, had my reasons," said Cripps, in a low voice—"for I feared Ogledon, and my own connection with him, and I suspected that Ogledon had killed him."

Madge had laid her head down on the grimy table, and was weeping bitterly. "Then it is true," she said, in a whisper—"Dandy Chater is dead!"

"Steady, my lass!" said the Captain, laying his rough hand lightly on her shoulder—"Don't give way; for there's summin' I've got to tell you."

She raised her head, and looked full into his eyes. Kindly eyes they were, and they smiled at her sympathetically.

"A long while ago, my lass, there was a cruel wrong done—a bright lad cut out of 'is 'ome, an' all that should 'ave bin 'is, an' cast adrift, many miles across the sea, without a name—an' with the brand of 'Bastard' upon 'im. That lad was my pal Phil Chater; an' 'e was the twin brother of Dandy Chater."

Again the words singing in her ears—"The one living—the other dead!"

"Think on it, my lass," went on the Captain gently. "The one boy—an' 'im the youngest—brought up in luxury, an' with powdered lacqueys for to wait on 'im at every turn; the other—an' 'im the eldest—sent miles across the sea, an' roughin' it like any common child. Lost in the bush, 'e was—pitched about from one place to another—'omeless, friendless, without a compass. But—an' mark you this, my lass—if ever a boy steered 'isself straight by the stars o' God, that boy Phil did. An' when at last

'e comes 'ome, with no thought in 'is 'eart of anythink but a 'earty greetin' for 'is brother, an' a share-and-share alike business with that brother—an' finds 'im dead—wot do 'e do? I put it to you, Miss—wot do my pal Phil do?"

She looked at him, with a brighter face, and slowly shook her head.

"My pal Phil finds as that brother of 'is loved a young gel—(an' I don't need look far, for to find that young gel to-night!)—an' was loved by 'er. Phil is took for the real Dandy by that young gel—an' 'e loves 'er! Bein' afear'd that, if she knowed the truth, she would cast 'im off, 'e takes 'is brother's place—'is brother's sins—dips 'is clean 'ands, so to speak, in the blood that guilty brother shed—an' all—mark you this, my lass—all for love of that young gel. An', for love of 'er—the Judge will cry 'Death!' on Phil Chater to-morrer!"

The Captain, in his honest excitement and admiration, had risen to his feet, and waved one arm above his head. Madge had risen, too, with almost equal excitement.

"There was one man as could 'ave saved 'im—a man of the name of Ogledon—"

"Ogledon is dead," said Madge. "He died to-night, and can do neither good nor harm any more. But we"—she looked round quickly at both men—"we can save him; we can prove to all the world that this man is innocent, and is suffering for another. The trial is to-morrow—the first on the day's list. We must reach Chelmsford to-morrow morning; we must save this man!"

The Captain looked at her, in an excess of admiration. "My lass," he said slowly—"I ain't surprised that my pal Phil should 'ave gorn through wot 'e 'as, for sich a gel! I'd 'ave disowned 'im, if 'e'd done less!"

The sun is shining brightly outside the crowded court-house; and men and women, densely packed within the walls, glance up at the grimy windows, and from them to the prisoner, and wonder, perhaps, what he is thinking about. The prisoner, for his part, scarcely makes a movement—scarcely turns his weary eyes round when any one speaks. For hope has gone out of him; the battle has been fought and lost; the murderer of the real Dandy Chater is dead and has carried his secret into another Place where all secrets are known. The crowd of faces about him bears but one stamp upon it all—hard, unrelenting, vengeful, every face there looks upon him with certainty as a dead man and is glad to think that he gets what he deserves.

There has been—as there always is in such cases—much eloquence on both sides—and some dramatic moments. At the present the jury are a little tired of it, and the Judge palpably nods; for the whole thing is such a foregone conclusion. The great man who has come down specially instructed by the Treasury, has pointed out that this, gentlemen, is a case in which no considerations of social standing, birth or position must be allowed to weigh. Indeed, gentlemen of the most intelligent jury, in the most intelligent country of the world, if it be possible to make it a little hotter for the prisoner than is made already, then, gentlemen, clearly it is your duty to make it hotter. For this man—(a most desperate character you must understand, gentlemen—as witness the cloud of police about the dock and even in the dock with him)—this man had the advantages of a great name—a fine position—much property. Yet, gentlemen, what have you heard of him? He stands before you a convicted forger, bank robber—burglar—and as you will have thrust down your throats a little more, gentlemen, a murderer! You have had a most honest gentleman here to-day on whom stolen notes were passed to cover the amount of a forgery committed by the prisoner on his greatest friend. You have heard of transactions whereby the estate handed down to the prisoner has been gradually sapped away by riotous living until not one stick of it remains that is not encumbered or bartered away. And to-day, gentlemen, in effect, behold the prisoner brought before you to receive his just doom!

All this and much more from the learned gentleman instructed by the Treasury. A movement in Court as the learned gentleman sits down and the prisoner turns his eyes in the direction of a new voice.

The new voice belongs to Mr. Andrew Banks, rising young barrister; and Mr. Andrew Banks is disposed to be flippant. For it must not be understood, gentlemen of the jury, that because a man of the station of life of the prisoner has run through a fortune—or half-a-dozen fortunes for the matter of that—and has made a mistake in the exuberance of his heart in signing some one else's name instead of his own—it must really not be imagined, gentlemen, that that man for that reason is capable of the atrocious crime with which he stands charged. In fact, this rising young barrister would have the gentlemen of the jury believe that the fact of his having done these things and done them in an open-handed devil-may-care gentlemanly fashion, rather redounds to his credit than otherwise—and goes indeed far to prove him incapable of such a crime as this. The rising young barrister would beg to call the attention of this most intelligent jury to the witnesses relied upon for the prosecution. One—the witness in regard to the forgery and the stolen notes—is a sixty per-cent. money-lender who has doubtless bled the prisoner pretty freely for years; the other—and a most unwilling witness it must be remembered, gentlemen—is a former servant of the prisoner and now on his own confession out of a situation. In a word, gentlemen of the jury, this rising young barrister absolutely flouts the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution; has a little to say about hearths and homes and British liberties; and sits down amid a little murmur of applause.

But the rising young barrister is not so sanguine as he appears, for he leans across towards his learned brother from the Treasury and whispers before that gentleman rises again—"Devilish uphill work! Can't get a word out of him—won't suggest any course of defence at all."

A few more words from the prosecution—wholly unnecessary words, for the jury are whispering and have obviously made up their minds. Then amid a silence the Judge sums up; would evidently be

merciful if he could; but is compelled to point out all the most damning facts against the prisoner—his desperate attempts to regain his liberty—the absence of any evidence to rebut the weight of testimony brought forward by the prosecution. In a word, gentlemen of the jury, your course is clear before you, and you are called upon to do your duty.

A whispering—a rustling—and a nodding of heads among the jurymen; for it is not even necessary for them to retire. Then amid a silence greater even than before the usual questions are put and the verdict—known long ago to every man and every woman in the Court—is spoken in one word. Guilty!

As though that word loosed the pent-up emotions and passions of the crowded place, and as though the grim satisfaction at the supposed justice of the thing can no longer be suppressed, a great cheer breaks out and rolls through the Court and out through echoing corridors into the street itself; where it is taken up by hundreds of throats and sent on and on to fill the town. Then following immediately on it and as suddenly as though no sound had been raised, fell a death-like silence; for Judge and prisoner are face to face—eye to eye. But though he were asked a thousand times, the prisoner has nothing to offer—except the simple words—“I am innocent.” Men whisper each other that he seems stunned.

Some one glides behind the Judge and fits a square of black on his wig. The Judge has actually opened his mouth to speak, when there comes a sudden commotion at the doors; cries of remonstrance; people thrusting this way and that; and foremost of a little knot of people who seem to be fighting their way in—a woman.

She stops for nothing—will be stopped by nothing. Men fall back from before her as though she had some power above mere humanity. Philip Chater turning towards where she comes, has a dim idea that Cripps—staggering and waving his arms; Betty Siggs, with her arms stretched out towards him; Captain Quist struggling fiercely with a gigantic constable—are all about that central figure. Then the imperious voice of the woman rings out above all the tumult.

“Stop—in God’s name! That man is not Dandy Chater!”

GOING—GOING—GONE!

Six months had gone by since Dandy Chater—or Philip Chater as he really was—stood on trial for his life; and with the turn of the year, Quist's Royal Circus and Unparalleled Combination of Equestrian Talent had come again to Bamberton. Judging by the appearance of the Captain as he sat smoking his pipe on the steps of his caravan, the venture had been so far a profitable one; for the Captain was somewhat rounded and ruddier even than of old.

It was the afternoon of a warm and sunny day, and the Captain was evidently very well pleased with the day and the world in general and himself in particular; for he smiled and chuckled over his pipe and gave himself sundry little soft slaps on the leg as though he had some joke which he greatly relished. Finding presently that it was quite impossible to keep the joke to himself, he threw his head back a little and called softly through the open door of the caravan.

"Missis!"

A muffled voice inside demanded to know what he wanted.

"Where's them there two turtle-doves?" asked the Captain in a heavy whisper.

A sound as of some one moving in the caravan was heard, and then Mrs. Quist came to the door and stood above him. And Mrs. Quist—grim red-headed female that she was—actually smiled also and kicked Captain Quist softly in the small of the back. 321

"Go 'long with yer!" she said laughing. "It's a pity there shouldn't be some on 'em as plays the turtle-dove a bit! We ain't all like you was—I believe you'd a done *your* courtin' through a speakin' trumpet of you'd 'ad your way—you was that public. An' I'm sure, considerin' as 'ow they've only bin married this mornin', you might giv' 'em time to say a word or two to each other."

"Ole gal," responded the Captain solemnly—"w'en I said 'turtle-doves' it were not to be took sarcastic. I honours 'im for 'is feelin', an' I fairly dotes on 'er blushes."

Mrs. Quist administered another kick to the Captain but seemed well pleased.

"You an' me, ole gal, 'ad not the figger 'eads for beauty w'en we stood up afore the parson; we might 'ave bin useful in our stations—but there's no denyin' as we was 'omely; pleasant to look upon if yer like—but 'omely."

"Well—yer needn't rub it in," retorted Mrs. Quist.

"Far be it from me so to do, ole gal. But wot I would say is this 'ere; that it's a delight for to look on them young 'uns as was married this mornin'. Adam an' Eve in the garding of Eden a goin' 'alves with the apple weren't a prettier picture than 'Arry an' Clara—take my word of it."

"Well Peter—I will say this for yer; that it was a good day's work for you w'en you done the 'andsome by them young people. We 'aven't any chicks of our own—an' that boy 'as got sich a way with 'osses, that 'e was fairly born to look arter a circus. An' the gel—well, I took a fancy to that child w'en fust she come to lodge with me at Chelmsford." 322

Mrs. Quist, with another friendly kick, returned into the caravan, and the Captain continued to smoke his pipe. Indeed, so engrossed was he with the pipe and with his own pleasant reflections, that he did not observe very closely a figure coming along the road towards him; or if he looked at it at all, saw in it merely a chance traveller and no concern of his. But presently as the figure drew nearer, a remarkable change came over the Captain. Gradually the hand which held the pipe came away from his mouth, bringing the pipe with it, but leaving the mouth open; the placidity of the Captain's face changed and melted away, and in its place came an expression of blank amazement. Then as the figure came nearer still, amazement fled, and with a shout the Captain leapt to the ground and ran forward.

"Phil Chater! Phil Chater come back to see 'is old pal!" he exclaimed, shaking the new-comer's hand again and again.

It was the Philip of six months before, save only for a certain weariness about the eyes and some lines in the face which had not been there before. He stopped the Captain with a gesture of his hand when that gentleman in his excitement would have summoned Mrs. Quist to share his joy, and they sat down together on the bank beside the patch of grass on which the caravan stood. 323

"I wanted to have a chat with you, old friend, before going away again," said Philip after a pause. "So—coming to Bamberton to-day—for the last time—on business, I thought as I heard that the circus was here that I'd walk over. And how are you prospering?"

"Never better," replied the Captain rubbing his hands. "Whether it is, Phil, that the experience I gained, so to speak, in a life on the rollin' main is valuable—or wot it is, I don't know; but certain it is that they comes to my circus w'erever I 'appens to stop—an' they claps their 'ands to a quite remarkable extent, an' they laughs at the clown over 'is oldest jokes, min' yer—things as my poor ole mother used to 'ush me ter sleep with—in sich a way that the chap is a beginnin' to give 'isself airs. You remember the melancholy lookin' man wot 'auled you out of the fly that night on this 'ere very road—don't yer? Well—I do assure you, Phil, that that chap is a gettin' fat on applause alone; 'is things 'as bin let out twice in two months."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Philip laughing. "And how is Mrs. Quist?"

"Fine—an' 'earty," responded the Captain. "More than all she's a beginnin' to take an interest in 'osses an' talks sometimes as if she'd lived over a stable all 'er days. But—now you'll be surprised to 'ear this, Phil, I know you will—she won't 'ear of no fat ladies. Puts 'er foot on 'em, so to speak, I do assure you."

"Really?" said Philip, hiding a smile. "You surprise me. But now I want to talk for a moment about myself; for I may not have a chance of speaking to you again—at any time."

The Captain looked at him in dismay. "Why—wot do yer mean, Phil, my lad?" he said.

"Well—to tell you the truth at once—I'm going abroad," replied Philip. "I made a mistake from one point of view in ever coming back at all; I've brought endless misery on any number of innocent heads and have done no good—for I'm poorer than when I came. My unfortunate brother had practically got rid of everything that could be disposed of and owed money all the way round. When after my release I came to look into affairs, I found—or rather I was advised—that I need not pay a single penny of his debts; that as they had been contracted by him while the property was not his, but mine, as the elder brother, I might repudiate everything. But of course I couldn't do that; I made up my mind to get rid of the place and pay as much as possible of what was owing."

"An' did you?" asked the Captain.

Philip laughed somewhat bitterly. "Why no," he said. "For I found when it came to the point of selling that I had nothing to sell; a certain Jew money-lender held a mortgage on the place and on every stick it contained. He's selling it up to-day, at this very hour. No, old friend, the game is played out; and I start the world once more. I have enough to carry me back to Australia and to give me a little start there; and I sail in a few days' time."

The Captain was evidently very much depressed, for he slowly shook his head and looked at the ground with a troubled face. Philip Chater rallyingly clapped him on the shoulder and began to talk of other things.

"Come," he said, "you must have lots of things to talk to me about—and any amount of news for me. There is one thing I should like to know very much; what has become of little Clara Siggs?"

As if in answer to the question, the Captain raised his head and softly touched Philip on the arm. "See there she comes, Phil," he said, "an' under safe convoy!"

Philip Chater, looking in the same direction, saw advancing towards them the girlish form of Clara leaning on the arm of Harry Routley. He sprang up to meet them and the girl advanced alone.

For a moment there was silence between them; the Captain had drawn apart and was talking with Harry. Then Clara, looking up into Philip's face, told the end of her story so far as it could concern him.

"Mr. Chater—I was married this morning—and am the happiest girl on earth. When I tried to tell Harry that I had once in my wild wayward fashion cared for your brother—he would not let me speak; he kissed my lips to silence me. I thought that I should like you to know that I am very, very happy; that I am with people who are good to me, and whom I love and respect, and that whatever mad dream was once in my foolish heart is buried as deep as the brother you never knew in life."

His heart was too full in that hour of parting to say anything in reply; he held her hand for a moment and then turned towards Harry.

"You thought badly of me once, Harry—and I'm afraid you've been blaming yourself ever since for any trouble you may have caused me. Don't think of it any more; you, like every one else, were working in the dark. Now you understand and we part the best of friends—don't we?"

A little later Philip Chater set off towards Bamberton; something seemed to draw him to the place as it had never done before. He knew that the sale had taken place that day and that Chater Hall was lost to the Chaters forever; but he had a morbid desire to see it once again that he might carry away with him the remembrance of the home which had never been his, into whatever exile he might be going.

It was almost dark when he traversed that long winding path which he had once watched as a fugitive through a whole day. But he came at last to the place and noticed, in the desolation of his heart, that the great hall door stood open and that all within seemed blank and empty.

"I wonder who has bought it," he muttered to himself, "and who will live here in the years to come."

There seemed to be no one about, and he walked in and turned into that room into which he had first gone on the occasion of his coming to Bamberton. And being in the room stopped dead with his heart beating suffocatingly; for there was a figure standing in one of the windows.

He knew, even in the semi-darkness of the place, that it was Madge Barnshaw before she turned her head or spoke; something in the mere fact of her being there told him that. He would have given anything not to have met her at that time and in that place; but there was no possibility of his getting away—for she turned and saw him.

She came quickly towards him and almost before he knew her hand was in his and she was looking straight into his eyes. "I wanted to see you," she said slowly. "I waited here—strange as it may seem—in the hope that you would come."

"Would it not have been better," he replied bitterly, "if you had never seen me at all?"

She shook her head and a smile played for a moment about her lips. "That is an ungenerous thing to say," she replied. "Surely it is right that we should meet here—in your home."

"Mine no longer," he said. "It was sold to-day to pay some of the debts I took upon me when I took the name of Dandy Chater."

"Well—and do you know who bought it?" she asked almost in a whisper.

Something in her face as she bent nearer to him, still holding his hands, seemed to answer the question without the need of any word from him. She went on rapidly.

"When you first came to me, Philip, my heart was full of pity for a man who had professed his love for me often and often. Fool that I was, I never saw that a better man stood in his place—spoke with his voice—wooed me for his own sake and not because of his dead brother! Philip, you spoke just now of debts you have paid—and I know of burdens you have borne—for the sake of that brother. Philip"—she came nearer to him in the darkness—"there is another debt you must pay if you will, another burden you must bear. You have taken upon yourself the name of Dandy Chater, be Dandy Chater still to me—and love me!"

He held her in his arms even while he tried to reason with his heart that it was not just nor fair. But when she thrust the deeds of the house in his hands; when she went upon her knees to him and raised her pure face to his; when she prayed that he would take the place that was his, in his home and in her heart; what could he say?

In effect it was all summed up clearly and fairly that night by Mrs. Betty Siggs in the housekeeper's room to Mrs. Dolman in a moment of confidence.

"The sins as Master Dandy did 'as bin wiped out an' nothing need be said about 'em. Mark my words, Mrs. Dolman, the time is coming when a new Dandy Chater is a goin' to reign at the 'All—a Chater as'll be a squire in summing more than name! An' more than that, Mum, there won't be no mistakes about this one; for 'e's my dear boy, an' there ain't another like 'im in the wide world. An' so, Mum,"—Mrs. Siggs raised her glass before her smiling face, for they were discussing supper—"I gives yer as a toast—"The Second Dandy Chater."

THE END

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The author's original words have been retained, with occasional minor corrections of punctuation. Because the author used dialect in the book, this sometimes results in unique spelling of various words and contractions.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND DANDY CHATER ***

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